

THE RISE AND GROWTH OF THE  
LIBERAL THEOLOGY IN NEW ENGLAND;  
TO 1825

A  
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## INDEX

### Introduction

The First Settlements In New England -----	1.
The Condition of the Colonies Until 1735 -----	16.
Arminianism, the Great Awakening, and the Con- sequent Theological Dissent -----	43.
The Growth of Liberalism From the Great Awakening to the Period of the Revolution. Appendix on the Episcopal Church -----	56.
The Revolutionary Period -----	76.
The Emergence of Unitarianism -----	104.
Conclusion -----	132.

### Bibliography

## Introduction

One with even a casual acquaintance with the history of New England must be impressed with the tremendous difference in the theological temper of seventeenth-century New England and that of nineteenth century New England. The sharp contrast between these two periods amounts to the difference between two worlds of thought. The theology of New England at the end of the seventeenth century was Calvinistic. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Calvinism had been rejected by many individuals, and an increasing number of churches were departing from the orthodoxy of the founders of the New England colonies. By 1825, so many churches had come to think of themselves as beyond the pale of orthodox Calvinism, that the American Unitarian Association was formed - an association of churches all of which had been founded by Calvinists and many of which were among the oldest churches in the Colonies.

What had happened during the intervening years to explain the widespread development away from Calvinism and toward Unitarianism which so distinctly sets apart these two centuries?

The story of the early religious history has been told over and over again. In general three approaches have been made to this body of material. The first is that of the general historian who, in chronicling the history of the United States, has had of necessity to deal with the motives which led to the first settlements in this country, and therefore has told briefly something of the religious development of the first centuries. Characteristic of this general approach has been an emphasis upon the desire of the first settlers for religious freedom, and that desire for freedom has been seen as the prelude to the establishment of the colonies as a nation.

The second approach has been that of the church historian who sought to record the development either in terms of a single denomination or of all the denominations involved. Where the story has been told in terms of a particular denomination, the Congregationalist, the Unitarian, or the Universalist, the movement was connected with its European antecedents, and regarded to a greater or lesser extent, as a continuation of a European development. But whether the history was recounted from a denominational vantage point or not, this approach has been a descriptive one; a setting forth of the events and development, more from an ecclesiastical point of view than a theological one. That is to say, the movement was dealt with as an ecclesiastical organization more than as a theological movement.

The third general approach has been that of the theologian or the historian of theology. The most important example - and almost the only one - is Frank Hugh Foster's A Genetic History of the New England Theology. This approach places a minimum of stress upon the events of the ecclesiastical organization and the maximum of emphasis upon inner theological development.

On the face of it, it would seem that the last of these three approaches would promise most in helping to throw light upon the problem with which this story is concerned - the breakdown of the Calvinist solidarity of seventeenth-century New England, and the emergence of liberalism, in the form of Unitarianism, in the nineteenth century. Actually, the third approach, the genetic approach, is the least helpful.

In the genetic approach to the theology of New England, the central and commanding figure is Jonathan Edwards. His was not only the

most powerful theological mind produced in New England in three hundred years, but his influence in terms of the "New England theology", as his thought and that of his followers is known, was large. Yet from the point of view of this study, and in relation to the problem herein considered, Jonathan Edwards was of minor importance. Indeed, one might almost say that he was of negative importance, since the movement - "The Great Awakening" - with which he was connected, is to be seen as one of the precipitating and causative factors in the growth of liberalism.

A fourth approach is thus suggested.<sup>1</sup> Without disregarding the other three approaches, it tries to relate the theological and religious development to the general cultural development. It tries to set the theology of the period in a background of political, economic, social factors as well as the general intellectual temper. If justification of approach is needed, one need only consider the fact that if the emergence of Unitarianism were to be seen solely or chiefly as the result of a genetic, logical development of theology, it probably would never have happened. The Unitarians did not meet the Trinitarians in the area of theology and defeat them logically on the points of the unity of God and the nature of Jesus. The Unitarians had shifted the whole basis of premise and assumption from which theology starts. No amount of logic thrown at the superstructure of Unitarianism would have destroyed it. Likewise, if Arminianism had been purely or chiefly a result of a logical defect in Calvinism, Jonathan Edwards would have

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1. W. A. Visser 'T Hooft, in his The Background of the Social Gospel in America, uses this approach. The writer regards this book as an extremely important contribution to the understanding of the development of the religious situation in America. More will be said of it in the conclusion.

effectively curtailed its development. Those whom Edwards attacked as Arminians had changed their basic assumptions about the nature of man. They were Arminians not because Arminianism was superior in logic to Calvinism, but because Arminianism started from assumptions concerning human nature which were more palatable than those of Calvinism.

At the heart of the liberal movement whose rise and growth this study traces, was a different conception of man ~~than~~ that of Calvinism. By liberalism two related things are meant. First, any idea which is antagonistic to the essential tenets of Calvinism, which is regarded as the norm of orthodoxy. Secondly, "liberalism" is used in a more general, and often political, sense of an optimistic view of man, his capacities, his worth, his ability to use reason to arrive at truth, which in turn is regarded as that which reason, rather than revelation, establishes.

## Chapter I

### The First Settlements In New England

In 1629, there were in New England, two groups of English-speaking people, representing two different traditions. One group had settled at Plymouth in 1620. This group comprised the Pilgrims, who were members of a Separatist church which had been organized at Scrooby, England, in 1606. The second group was the Puritan Colony which settled at Salem in 1629. Notwithstanding a common opposition to the Roman influences and practises of the English church, they had come here independently of each other, and held ecclesiastical ideas which were mutually exclusive. The Puritans shared the Pilgrims' intense hatred of all that savored of Catholicism, and their desire to purify the English church. But whereas the Puritans believed still in a national, state church which would include all, and had come to New England not to set up a new church, but a purified Church of England, the Pilgrims had surrendered any hope of reforming and purifying the English church, and came to New England to create new congregations of "believers only" wherein the purification could be secured "without tarrying for anye."

Despite the differences in ecclesiastical theory which were wide and far-reaching, the Pilgrims and Puritans shared a common theology, the theology of John Calvin. Both groups emphasized the central strand of Calvinism, the sovereignty of God. To Pilgrims and Puritans alike God was "the transcendent, omnipotent God, whose ways are infinitely higher than our ways, whose will cannot be measured by human norms or human judgment, who creates law but is not Himself bound by it."<sup>1</sup>

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1. W. A. Visser 'T Hooft. The Background of the Social Gospel in America. P. 71.

He is "almighty, absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable will, for his own glory."<sup>1</sup>

Both the Pilgrims and the Puritans, as Calvinists, held to the doctrine of predestination as a corollary of the sovereignty of God. They believed that God, as a manifestation of his glory, elected some to salvation. But they also, as many other Calvinists, accepted a double-edged doctrine of predestination: as some were elected to eternal salvation, so some were elected to eternal damnation. This was a position to which Calvin came only after some struggle and one in which he was not altogether happy, but the first New England settlers found no difficulty with it. The belief that some are eternally damned was as much a part of their faith as that God had marked some for eternal bliss.<sup>2</sup>

The conception of God as a sovereign being who elects some to salvation, necessarily involves a conception of salvation in which the initiative is with God and not with man. Man, therefore, can neither resist God's grace, nor earn or obtain it by his own effort; it is solely the gift of God. Both the doctrine of the irresistibility of grace, and the inability of man to effect his own salvation, were an integral part of the Calvinistic theology as accepted by the Puritans.

Puritanism inherited from Calvinism a vivid sense of the timeless awfulness of sin and the total depravity of the individual. Man was regarded as thoroughly evil, not alone because Adam's sin was

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1. Quoted by I. W. Riley from the Boston Platform (1648) in American Philosophy. P. 25.

2. cf. Deliberations of Cambridge Synod in 1648 upon Westminster Confession of Faith.



his heritage, but also because only a totally depraved person could commit such sin as was repugnant to the holiness of God. Yet there was salvation from sin through the atoning death of Christ who reclaimed the sinner, and relieved the offendedness of God. Jesus imputed to every one who was elected to salvation, his own righteousness in the place of Adam's sin. The atonement of Jesus, however, was available only to those whom God had elected to be saved.<sup>1</sup>

It might seem from the point of view of logic, that the doctrines of predestination and election would naturally lead to an extreme fatalism and quietism, and that the doctrine of the inability of man to repent or to aid in his own conversion and salvation would give an additional impetus to a deadly inertia. Such however, was not the case. On the contrary, there was a tireless and unceasing effort on the part of Calvinists to glorify God in the world of their common activities. The explanation of this paradox is to be found in the doctrine of justification. Good works are not a means to salvation, or the condition upon which salvation is awarded, but good works are the consequence and attestation of salvation. The moral inspiration of salvation and forgiveness enabled the Calvinist to struggle as he never struggled before. Indeed, good works, though not a means to salvation, became to the Puritan an earnest that he has been saved, since the "good works of an unsaved man" is a contradiction in terms. "For since conduct and action, though availing nothing to attain the free gift of salvation, are a proof that the gift has been accorded, what is

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1. cf. Westminster Confession.

rejected as a means is resumed as a consequence, and the Puritan flings himself into practical activity with the demonic energy of one who, all doubts allayed, is conscious that he is a sealed and chosen vessel."<sup>1</sup>

Tawney's statement hints at a conception which is characteristic not only of the Calvinistic theology but also of the whole Protestant ethic, the conception of "calling" or "vocation." The Calvinist was not only elected to a life of bliss and fellowship in the future, but his salvation included service of God in this world among his fellow men. As the Catholic ideal was to flee the world, so the Protestant ideal was to utilize it for spiritual service, enrichment and moral growth. The typically godly life was no longer that of the monk in his cell or the hermit in his cave attempting to beat down his desires, but that of the man diligent and faithful as a steward in this world. The old distinctions between secular and sacred were broken down, and the whole world was regarded as the proper scene of activities for the Christian. (Note. This new "asceticism" of labor re-spiritualized types of work which were formerly considered profane, and we have in later Puritanism books with such titles as: Navigation Spiritualized, Husbandry Spiritualized, The Religious Weaver.)

Not less characteristic, not only of early Calvinism but more especially of later Puritanism, was the sense of Providence. Holding the faith that God had elected them to salvation and called them according to His special purpose, they looked for a providential meaning in

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1. R. H. Tawney. Religion and Rise of Capitalism. P. 230. cf. Ernest Troeltsch. The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches. V. II, P. 680.

every incident in their lives. Where this belief took an extreme form, it was the mark of a holy and wise man to be able to solve the various riddles by which God was trying to communicate His thoughts to man.<sup>1</sup>

In one respect, however, the Puritan theology differed from the thought of John Calvin, the mere fact of which indicates that though the Puritans were essentially adherents to Calvinism, they were not bound so rigidly that innovations and modifications were impossible. In Calvin's conception of God there was a vivid awareness of the 'hiddenness' of God. He believed that we know only such things about God as He chooses to let us know out of regard either to our profit or capacity.<sup>2</sup> "Calvin with iron consistency had always rejected attempts to find out too much about God's will. To him God is truly mysterious in His decrees and actions, and it does not behoove men to speak or act as if they could look into the very motives of God's will. In Puritanism something of this sublime faith in God's transcendence and mysteriousness had disappeared and it would seem as if the arbitrariness of God had come to replace his mysteriousness. There is a self-confidence as to the ultimate meaning of God's will in the preaching of the Puritan divines which exceeds the bounds of reverence, and which justifies a good deal of the vehemence of the later reactions against the doctrine from which it seemed to flow."<sup>3</sup>

It was inevitable that Puritanism, separated by time and by different social and intellectual conditions from the Calvinism of Geneva,

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1. M. C. Tyler. History of American Literature. Vol. I, P. 102.
  2. A. Mitchell Hunter. The Teachings of Calvin. P. 49.
  3. W. A. Visser 'T Hooft. The Background of the Social Gospel in America. P. 71.

should show divergencies of thought. The chief modifications and differences, however, did not at the time of the coming of Puritanism to New England, attach to the fundamental theological ideas of Calvinism. The modifications which a minute and close scrutiny of Puritanism in both England and New England in 1630 divulge, were in the nature of additions and accretions which occurred under the peculiar circumstances surrounding Puritan groups.<sup>1</sup>

Thus it may be said that the Puritan groups in England and New England in 1630, showed no important deviations from the essential theological tenets of primitive Calvinism. With respect to ideas of church government, the Puritans, though not exactly Calvinistic, followed ecclesiastical dispositions which were, in the main, similar to those of Calvinism. (Under the influence of the Pilgrim Separatists, the Puritans in New England underwent a revolutionary change, however.) Calvinism tended naturally toward a close-knit ecclesiastical system with authority residing definitely in the higher bodies rather than in the individual or the local congregation. The relation-

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1. Thus Troeltsch: "The following Puritan characteristics bring out the difference between this movement and that of primitive Calvinism: a far more intense individualism, which in spite of all the means of grace, sets God and the soul over against each other in solitary immediacy; a detailed estimate of and examination into good works as 'signs' of election, which introduces a legalism, self-righteousness, and a systematic asceticism to an extent which was unknown in genuine Calvinism; the spirit of solitary individual self-control and ascetic discipline, which does not include pleasure in the gifts and revelation of God in nature, but which still distinguishes the elect, who use the 'speech of Canaan' and whose manner of life is strict, from the children of 'the world' and the 'children of wrath'. In all this the influence of new motives is undeniable. These new motives may be thus briefly summarized: the individualizing effects of the dogma of predestination, the collapse of strict ecclesiasticism through a period of ecclesiastical strife, and the division of Society into the strict and the lax. Naturally that produced a very different situation from that which had obtained in Calvin's strictly uniform Christian State." V. II, P. 680.

ship of the church resembled the Old Testament theocracy in which the church is based upon a divine covenant. In Calvinism, the state was to serve the church after the manner of the Kings of Israel, at their best, and the public life was to be supervised by the pastors, after the manner of the Hebrew prophets.<sup>1</sup>

The Puritans (with, of course, the exception of the Independents in England, who were "Congregationalists" or "separatists", as the Pilgrims in New England were) shared practically the same view of the church, in the main. In the English church the control was from above, not indeed by Presbyteries and Synods, but through the principle of Episcopacy. In the Puritans of England and New England, as with the Calvinists in Geneva, the ideal was not that of a sect, but of an inclusive, national church.

The Pilgrims, on the other hand, were separatists who conceived the church as a sect, as a society of "believers only". They, following the teaching of Browne, completely disassociated the church and the state as having neither functional similarity or divine connection. They denied that the state had the right to command conscience or coerce reason, and they believed that religion was gravely endangered in its spiritual character by too intimate an identification with the state.<sup>2</sup> They asserted the right of any body of Christians, however small, to set up a church, subject to no other congregation or group of congregations, or any higher ecclesiastical body, and they denied the powers of the magistrates or any legal authority to interfere.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Troeltsch. Vol. II. P. 586.

2. A. M. Fairburn. Studies in Religion and Theology.

3. Cambridge Modern History. Vol. 3. P. 756.

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There had been enmity between the Pilgrims and the Puritans in England on the issue of ecclesiastical procedure, and it might have been expected that the two groups would have been at variance in New England. That the two groups did not retain their isolated hostility and that the Puritans followed the lead of the Pilgrims in establishing their churches on the principle of independency is a fact of the utmost significance, for as one writer says, "No step in the development of Congregationalism (and we may add - of New England theology) is more obscure or more important than this Congregationalizing of English Puritanism."<sup>1</sup>

How it came that the Puritan group adopted from the Pilgrim group the ecclesiastical principle of independency or separatism is not altogether clear. Certain it is that the first Puritan settlers left England with no thought of departing from the Church of England in anything save its "papish corruptions". So rigid in fact, was the mind of the Puritans on this point, that when a Ralph Smith, who became the first ordained minister in New England, with the Pilgrims at Plymouth, wished to sail with the Puritans to Salem, passage was at first denied him when it was known that he was a separatist, but later granted with the caution that "unless hee wilbe conformable to or government, yo suffer him not to remain with in the limitts of or graunt."<sup>2</sup>

So strongly aware were the Puritans of the difference between themselves and the Pilgrims that Higginson, who sailed from England with

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1. Williston Walker. A History of the Congregational Churches in the United States. P. 100.

2. Massachusetts Colonial Records. Vol. I. P. 390.

the first Puritans said: "We will not say as the Separatists were wont to say at their leaving of England, Farewell Babylon! Farewell Rome! But we will say, Farewell Dear England! Farewell the Church of God in England, and all Christian friends there! We do not go to New England as Separatists from the Church of England; though we cannot but separate from the Corruptions in it: But we go to practise the positive Part of Church Reformation and propagate the Gospel in America."<sup>1</sup>

When the advance guard of the Puritan settlers reached Salem, many were suffering from scurvy and infectious fever. Dr. Samuel Fuller of the Pilgrim settlement came to offer medical aid. Fuller had been a deacon in the Pilgrim Church in Leyden, under John Robinson, and was competent to render spiritual, as well as medical, aid. Apparently Fuller took the opportunity, while ministering to the physical needs of the Puritans, to inform them of the separatist convictions, for Governor Endecott, in a letter to Governor Bradford of the Plymouth Colony, thanked him for the services of Fuller, and acknowledged that the position of separatists, according to Fuller, was "being farr from ye commone reporte that hath been spread of you touching that particular."<sup>2</sup> It is impossible to determine the exact influence of Dr. Fuller at this point or to categorically deny the possible influence of other factors, but it is clear that the Puritans left England with no intention of setting up a new type of church: yet within a month of their arrival at

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1. Cotton Mather. Magnalia Christi Americana. Book 3. P. 74.

2. H. M. Dexter. The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years, As Seen in its Literature. P. 416.

Salem, we find the Puritans uniting to form a church by covenant, after the separatist pattern, and ordaining their pastor and teacher, disregarding the fact that both had been regularly ordained in England. Moreover, "notice was given of their intended proceedings to the church at New Plymouth, that so they might have their approbation and concurrence, if not their direction and assistance in a matter of that nature, wherein themselves had been but little before exercised."<sup>1</sup>

When word reached England of the turn of events in the Puritan Colony, the authorities and supporters of the enterprise expressed alarm in a letter to the Salem group at "some innovations attempted by yo," and intimated that they "utterly disallowe any such passages" and instructed them to look back upon their "miscarriage with repentance."<sup>2</sup> John Cotton, later an outstanding exponent of Congregationalism in New England, wrote the Rev. Mr. Skelton, of Salem, complaining against Skelton's refusal to allow Winthrop, Johnson, Dudley and Coddington to partake of the Lord's Supper, and because Skelton would not baptize Coddington's child, "because they had not yet become members of any particular Reformed Church" though they were members in good standing in the Church of England. Cotton wrote, "it added wonder to my grief" that Skelton had welcomed to Communion one who was a member of a separatist congregation in Southwark, and had baptized his child. "You went hence," wrote Cotton, "of another judgment, and I am afraid your change hath sprung from New Plymouth men."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Dexter. op. cit., P. 416.
  2. Dexter. P. 418.
  3. Dexter. P. 419.



In crossing the Atlantic Ocean one of the major purposes of the Puritans had been changed. In England, the Puritans had sought to reform an existing church; in New England they created new churches on an altogether different ecclesiastical principle. The Puritans surrendered the idea of an exclusive state church, and they abandoned the Prayer Book, which represented enforced conformity and uniformity. In following the Pilgrims, they accepted the principle of independency, under which each local congregation is autonomous, with the theological temper of each congregation determined not by reference to some uniform creed, but by the local membership. The view-point of John Robinson, the Pilgrim pastor in Leyden, was to be their attitude: "The Lord hath more light and truth to yet bring forth out of his Holy Word."

Between the years 1630 and 1640, twenty thousand settlers came to the Colony of Massachusetts Bay. They followed the example of the first Puritan colonists and adopted the congregational form of church organization. The First Church of Boston, organized in 1630, adopted, as did all of the Puritan Churches, a covenant of purpose similar to the one adopted by the Plymouth Congregation. This was a broad and inclusive agreement of membership and purpose, rather than a statement of theological belief. In addition to the covenant, some congregations drew up a creedal statement which was a consensus of the opinions of the members, but there was no creed-forming group for the churches as a whole, and no creedal-statement of an individual church was normative or binding upon individual members.

It is almost impossible to over-estimate the importance of this change in ecclesiastical polity. The hitherto close-knit character

of the Puritan and Calvinist churches with their control over the theological and moral purity of the congregations in an ecclesiastical group, was largely destroyed. Each congregation was now its own authority and could inaugurate whatever theological and ecclesiastical changes it saw fit. In the first years of the New England settlements, when there was a high degree of homogeneity in belief and point of view, it made little apparent difference. But later, when not only theological divergencies but differing ecclesiastical and moral views made their appearance, those who clung to an 'earlier' way could do nothing but forbear and advise.

Whence came this willingness to make, so rapidly, so fundamental a change? Not a few people have urged that the sense of liberty and democracy which so generally characterized the New England churches, and which finally found political expression in the Constitution, was the direct product of the essential emphases of Calvinism. This point of view has a large measure of truth in it. Certainly, the Calvinist doctrines of predestination and election which explain or announce God's gift to an individual apart from the individual's worth, background or present achievement in character, do tend toward a democratizing of life. Men are leveled, not down, but up; and before God, men are equal in a sense that they are not in the sight of other men. But while Calvinism made for a more democratic view of man and gave an impetus to individualism, it did not do so to the detriment of the place and authority of the state, and especially, of the church. By no stretch of the imagination can the form of ecclesiastical polity adopted in early New England be said to be the direct outcome of John Calvin's

thought: "Let any instructed Calvinist contemplate Calvin's feelings viewing the Congregational Independency of New England! Where purity of doctrine is of more importance than the good life, a group of conventicles, with no central power to enforce purity of teaching upon the associated churches, would be to Calvin the denial of all semblance of the One Church of Christ, founded by Him especially to guarantee truth and the right administration of the sacraments, and in spite of abuses, continuous throughout the ages."<sup>1</sup>

T. C. Hall, in his Religious Background of American Culture, locates the real sources of the religious, theological and ecclesiastical life of early New England, not in English Puritanism which went to the Continent for its essential characteristics, but in Wycliff.<sup>2</sup> He argues that "one should carefully distinguish between the High-Church, highly organized and historically orthodox Puritans and the Low-Church, radical, scattered and often very unorthodox dissenters."<sup>3</sup> He points out the similarity in the conceptions of the church as held by Wycliff and as held in Pilgrim Colony; conceptions which placed the value of simple prayer and preaching above the sacraments, and which made the church building a conventicle rather than a temple. The historic priest-hood lost practically all meaning in a group of "believers only", everyone of whom was a priest before God.

We readily admit that the Pilgrim group was characterized by points of view which effectively set them apart from the "High-Church"

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1. T. C. Hall. The Religious Background of American Culture. P. 99.
  2. Hall. Ibid. P. 69.
  3. Hall. Ibid. P. 70.

Puritan group of England. But the explanation of this difference cannot be clearly traced to Wycliff, though no one can deny a similarity to Wycliff. Rather, the rise of the Pilgrim-Separatist conception is to be found in the actual historical situation in sixteenth century England. The Pilgrims were Puritans who despaired of reforming and purifying the church from within, and in their desire for "reformation without tarrying for anye," they withdrew to set up a purified church. The principle of independency, they received not from a study of Wycliff, but emerged out of a particular and immediate situation as the best solution to their problem. They approached the idea of church polity not with a theory, but with a problem: the problem at first was to purify the Church of England. When it appeared not only extremely difficult to do that, but when they were faced also with the necessity of conforming to the unpurified church, they were forced to the theory of independency, on the score of an unpurified church and the fact of enforced conformity.

T. C. Hall's theory <sup>would</sup> forces one to believe that the early New England colonists - the Pilgrim-Separatists at Plymouth and the Puritans at Salem - were undifferentiated as regards themselves, but differentiated from the main Puritan groups in England. This theory therefore allows for no difference between the Plymouth group and the Salem group: but this misses the most important fact about the founding of these two colonies, the fact, namely, that the Puritans at Salem were influenced by the Pilgrim-Separatists at Plymouth, to adopt the independent-Congregational theory of church government, and were thus led in an entirely different direction.

Hall's theory assumes, in addition to a unanimity between the Plymouth Colony and the Salem group, that these together differed theologically from the Puritans in England. But this is not in keeping with the known facts. What at first distinguished the Pilgrim-Separatists from the Puritans at Salem, and what alone distinguished both groups, after the Puritans adopted the Pilgrim separatist idea, from English Puritanism, was not theological temper, but the form of church government.<sup>1</sup> This difference in church government did, as we shall show, give rise to theological difference, but at the beginning, the Colonists, at Plymouth and at Salem, were in substantial agreement with the theological convictions of English Puritans.<sup>2</sup>

And yet to be unmindful of one further characteristic of these early colonists would be to neglect an important factor in the future development. If the first settlers at both Plymouth and Salem were in substantial theological agreement with Calvinists and Puritans elsewhere, they were people of an adventurous mind, and were radical in the sense that they went to the root of the matter and took the course dictated by their conviction, undeterred by considerations of personal comfort and sacrifice. They were bold and brave people. There was no wide gap between their beliefs and their actions.

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1. E. M. Wilbur, in Our Unitarian Heritage, P. 391, writes that when the Pilgrim-Separatists were in Holland, Socinianism was just beginning to get a foothold there, and that they must have imbibed some of the spirit of religious toleration which was present in Socinianism and in the Dutch situation. The most definite, concrete support for Wilbur's suggestion is the fact that when Roger Williams was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for heterodoxy, in 1635, he was allowed to enter the Plymouth Colony.

2. cf. Harvard Theological Review, July 1918. P. 285. Article by John W. Buckham.

## Chapter II

### The Condition of the Colonies Until 1735

The first few years in the new settlements were largely concerned with the physical tasks of making a permanent home. From time to time groups of ministers met informally to discuss their mutual problems, but nothing resembling a formal ecclesiastical organization, beyond the local congregations, existed. In 1637, occurred, however, the first Synod. It met to consider the problems stirred up by the antinomian tendencies of Anne Hutchinson. The proposal for this assembly originated with some Massachusetts ministers, but the plan was submitted to the civil magistrates who approved the call for a Synod, and paid from the Colonial Treasury, the living and traveling expenses of ministers and delegates from churches beyond the confines of the Massachusetts Colony.<sup>1</sup>

One special circumstance suggests the zeal with which this group guarded the principle of independency and scrutinized any proposal that might conceivably lead to the development of a hierarchy. "The assembly broke up; and it was propounded by the governour that they would consider, that seeing the Lord had been so graciously present in this assembly, that matters had been carried on so peaceably, and concluded so comfortably in all love etc., if it were not fit to have the like meeting once a year, or at least, the next year, to settle what

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1. Walker. History of Congregational Churches. P. 142.

yet remained to be agreed, or if but to nourish love etc. . . This motion was well liked of all, but it was not thought fit to conclude it."<sup>1</sup>

A second Synod was held in 1643. The Westminster Assembly was gathering in London and apparently stimulated those in New England who were inclined toward "the views held at Westminster." Governor Winthrop noted that "the assembly concluded against some parts of the presbyterial way, and the Newberry ministers took time to consider the arguments etc."<sup>2</sup>

The third Synod was called in 1648, by the General Court, which expressed a "desire" that the churches of Massachusetts, Plymouth, Connecticut and New Haven send representatives to sit in Synod in Cambridge "to discusse, dispute, and cleare up, by the Word of God, such questions of church government and discipline in certain points before suggested, and others as they shall thinke needful and meete."<sup>3</sup>

Each of these Synods had been called to consider matters involving issues of church government and discipline. First, to consider the problem thrown up by Anne Hutchinson; the second because Presbyterianism had become articulate; the third because the advocates of Presbyterianism were now threatening to appeal to Parliament to change the ecclesiastical conditions which obtained in New England.

When the third Synod met again after a recess "the General

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1. Dexter. P. 431.  
2. Dexter. P. 432.  
3. Dexter. P. 436.

Court laid a new task upon the Synod. The Westminster Assembly was known to have prepared a Confession of Faith, which, though presented to Parliament in December, 1646, was not approved by that body till, after much revision, June, 1648. Till adopted by the Scottish General Assembly on August 27, 1647, it had been held secret; and its exact nature was in all probability unknown in New England when the General Court of Massachusetts met in October of that year. It doubtless seemed to many in New England that it would be well for the Synod to be ready with a confession of its own should that of Westminster prove to be unsatisfactory, and therefore the court requested seven of the Massachusetts ministers each to prepare 'a briefe forme of this nature and p'sent ye same to ye next session of ye synode'.<sup>1</sup>

The "Cambridge Platform" which finally came out of the Cambridge Synod is an ecclesiastical Constitution in seventeen chapters, built upon the assumption that "the partes of the Church-Government are all of them exactly described in the Word of God." It attempts to ascertain the scriptural pattern of the church, the character and conditions of its membership, its powers, its officers, their appointment and duties, its disciplinary power, the right of councils to advise, and the authority of the magistrate in ecclesiastical affairs.<sup>2\*3</sup>

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1. Walker. P. 159.

2. cf. Walker. P. 162.

3. The authority of the magistrate consisted chiefly in giving or withholding consent for a group of people to form a new church. The reason for this was the desire of preventing too many churches, and the control or elimination of sects which might be troublesome.



In a definitive statement the Cambridge Platform said, "A Congregational church is by the institution of Christ a part of the militant visible church, consisting of a company of saints by calling, united into one body by a holy covenant, for the publique worship of God, and the mutual edification of one another in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus."<sup>1</sup> Other characteristics of a Congregational church were, according to the Platform: the covenant as a basis of the local church; the autonomy of each congregation, with, however, association with other churches for fellowship and counsel; the representative character of the ministry; above all, the absence of any final authority in doctrine or polity, save the Word of God.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most important work of the Synod was the place given to church councils. The Synod realized the need for some bond between the churches, but rejected any variation of the Presbyterian or Episcopal positions. Provision was made for a system of Ecclesiastical Councils which were not to be permanent bodies, but to be convened for special purposes on special occasions. The Councils were to be made up of ministers and delegates who represented churches. The decisions of the Councils had no authority, but "had so much weight as there was weight in the reasons for them." The Councils terminated as soon as the business for which they had been called had been executed; they had no power of discipline. Where a church or a minister refused to accept the advice of a Council, the Council could only refuse "fellowship" to the recalcitrant.

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1. "Platform". Ch. 2, art. 6.

2. Cotton Mather. Magnalia. P. 213.

Before the Cambridge Synod ceased its work, it took cognizance of the request of the General Court that a confession of faith be drawn up. By this time copies of the Westminster Confession had been received in New England, and since the Synod saw no need of writing another confession, it approved the Westminster Confession as "very holy, orthodox and judicious" and "freely and fully consented to it for the substance thereof."<sup>1</sup> Yet in acknowledging general agreement with the Confession, the Cambridge Platform "makes special reference to the doctrine of 'election' or vocation as stated by the Assembly, and says that it 'passed not without some debate.' Then it says that the term 'vocation' and others by which it is described, are capable of a large or more strict sense, and adds that it is not intended to be binding precisely in point of order or method."<sup>2</sup>

More than two generations lived and died after the adoption of the Cambridge Platform, before any important movement arose for its modification. As has already been pointed out, the first years of the settlements were characterized by theological homogeneity, and whatever discussion and debate there was, centered in questions of the form of church organization rather than points of doctrine. A few ripples, however, did disturb this doctrinal calm. Anne Hutchinson had criticized the ministers for preaching a "covenant of works" but the controversy which ensued was not chiefly doctrinal. In the discussion of the Westminster Confession in Cambridge Synod, there was some reluctance to accept the Westminster statement on the doctrine of election. But this

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1. Walker. P. 188.

2. H. H. Saunderson. Modern Religion From Puritan Origins. P. 170.

is not to be taken as an evidence of widespread dissent. When the Platform was discussed by the churches, interest centered in the parts concerned with polity rather than on doctrine.

In 1650, however, William Pynchon published a book entitled "Meritorious Price of Our Redemption", which denied "that Christ suffered the torments of hell, or was under the wrath of God, or paid the exact penalty of our sins divinely imputed to him; and affirmed that the price of our salvation was mediatorial obedience - the voluntary offering of himself - which disposed the Father to forgive sin."<sup>1</sup> The Massachusetts legislature promptly ordered the book burned, and appointed the Rev. John Norton of Epwich, to refute Pynchon's views.

Though this episode indicated no general theological deflection, all was not well with the religious life of New England. The original colonists were people sifted out of the mass of Puritans in England. The struggles through which they had gone, the convictions which motivated them, the type of piety which had surrounded them, engendered a deep faith, which looked upon a conscious regenerative work of the spirit of God in the heart, as essential to the Christian hope. They were men who had taken a leading part in the struggle in England and who now held prominent positions in New England. They held strongly to the idea that the visible church should include only those who could give an account of the transforming operation of God in their lives.<sup>2</sup>

But in the Cambridge Platform, it had been agreed that children

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1. Walker. P. 216.

2. Walker. P. 95. Vol. 55, 56. "New England And Yale Review".

of church members were also members or "in the covenant." Members by birth, when they came of age, were expected to make public confession of their regeneration and religious experience, as a prelude to admission into full membership and to Holy Communion.

Increasingly the children of the first settlers, and the immigrants who came subsequent to the actual founding of the Colonies, found it difficult to make the same confession of regeneration and religious experience that the older group had. They had not been through the same trying experience of subduing a new land, the religious struggles in England, and they were not conscious to the degree that their fathers had been, of the Divine guidance. "These members of the second generation naturally showed some decline from the ardent type of piety which marked many of the founders. They were prevailingly of moral life, anxious for the religious training of their children, and desirous of throwing about them the safe-guards of church-watch and discipline; but in many instances they could point to no conscious work of divine grace in their own personal experience."<sup>1</sup>

What to do with these people was not easy to decide. To admit them to the Lord's Supper would be a break with the theory of a regenerate church-membership. But the problem became even more acute when the children of persons who were "members by birth" approached the age when they would normally enter the church. Members by birth were required to "give assent to the Christian religion," and to pledge themselves to

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1. Walker. P. 171.

obey its ordinances. In addition, they were required to submit to church discipline and inspection. But could they in turn give to their children "membership by birth" when they themselves were only "members by birth" and had not been admitted to the Lord's Supper, which was the mark of full membership?

This situation was the cause of concern not only because it indicated spiritual slackness, but also because complete citizenship and the right to vote were dependent, in part, upon church membership. Already questions were being raised in England not only about the religious state of the colonies, but about the political condition touching citizenship and the provisions of the charter.

In Plymouth Colony there was no religious test of suffrage. It was conferred by those who already possessed it upon all whom they deemed worthy. Connecticut likewise had no religious test but all the other colonies did. There sprang up therefore, a dissatisfaction with the state of things in which full citizenship was dependent upon full church membership, and full church membership so difficult to obtain under "the rigid terms of the Congregational Churches."<sup>1</sup><sup>2</sup>

There were two possible solutions to this problem. First, the conditions of church membership might be changed so that any baptized person not scandalous in life might be admitted to full communion and

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1. B. Trumbull. History of Connecticut. Vol. I. P. 298.

2. A letter from the King arrived in 1662, providing that "All freeholders of competent estates, not vitious in conversation and orthodoxe in religion . . . may have their votes in the election of all officers."  
--Dexter. P. 469.

given the right to have his children baptized, without evidence of regeneration. Or, a partial or subordinate membership might be granted which would give the privilege of having one's children baptized, but not the privilege of participation in the Lord's Supper, to anyone who was orthodox in belief and of acceptable moral character.

In a Synod called in 1662, to consider this whole situation which was causing agitation, the first alternative was rejected. By a vote of sixty-two to less than ten, the second alternative was accepted under an agreement which became known as the "Half-Way Covenant."

This step of great significance for the future was to a certain extent inherent in the change through which the Puritan group went when they accepted the Pilgrim-Separatist conception of the church. Central to that conception was the idea of a congregation of "believers only" who were "called out." But the Puritans have never really completely surrendered the idea of a "State-church" in the sense of a church that was open to all, and which was supported by the government and maintained by taxes levied regardless of attendance at or membership in, the church. This compromise or contradiction gave rise to the "Half-Way Covenant." At the time of its adoption, it was repudiated by many churches, but its use spread nevertheless.

Originally the Half-Way Covenant applied only to those who were "members by birth" - whose parents had been full members. But before long it was construed to mean that anyone, regardless of whether he had been baptized and regardless of the standing of his parents, might have his children baptized. In time this came to be used by people of lax

moral standards, and the outcome of the measure "was disastrous, for it was laxative and compromising rather than astringent and challenging."<sup>1</sup>

The period from 1660 to 1730 was a time of religious and moral stagnation in New England. Of this there is abundant evidence in the sermons of the time, especially in the Annual Election Day sermons.<sup>2</sup> The Half-Way Covenant is not to be regarded as a causative factor, at least at first, in the decline of piety and morals. Rather, it is to be seen chiefly as a symptom. Yet in so far as it represented an injudicious compromise, it had a bad effect, for just when the churches should have bent every effort to revivify and revitalize the religious life of the time, many of them took the step which least enabled them to play a creative and forceful role.

From 1670 to 1689, only three churches were organized in Massachusetts; a smaller number than in any previous decade or in any of the next several decades. Fewer persons were received into full membership and more moral lapses which compelled church discipline occurred.<sup>3</sup> So disturbing to both the church leaders and the civil authorities had the situation become that the General Court called a Synod to meet in 1679.

What were the causes of this manifest slackening of religious and moral zeal? The causes are many and varied, and are not easily assessed and analyzed. But among them may be mentioned: (1) The Half-Way

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1. Dexter. P. 475.

2. cf. A. E. Dunning. Congregationalists In America. P. 189.

3. Dunning. P. 189.

Covenant. We have seen how the Half-Way Covenant was construed to allow even those who had not been baptized and who were not "members by birth", the privilege of having their children baptized. Soon it was advocated that "half-way members" who were "earnest minded" might participate in the Lord's Supper, which was thought to have "saving power." This practice, known as "Stoddardeanism" - for Solomon Stoddard, grandfather of Jonathan Edwards - spread widely in Massachusetts and Connecticut. It was attacked by Cotton Mather, but Stoddard continued to urge it from pulpit and in print.<sup>1</sup>

With compromises like these, the door of the church was made so high and so wide that anyone could fall into it. Distinctions between the saints and the sinners, the saved and the unsaved, were obliterated, and membership in the church was sought for the social standing it afforded. To a blameworthy extent, the "salt had lost his savour."<sup>2</sup>

(2) Another cause of the decay of piety and morality was inherent in the Calvinist theology when it was preached in anything less than its fulness. There was a theological root to the difficulty which the Half-Way Covenant was designed to meet. "The doctrine of the sover-

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1. Stoddard. Sermon "Appeal to the Learned". 1709.

2. In addition to the modifications of the Half-Way Covenant by which unregenerate people were admitted to the Lord's Supper on the basis that "sanctifying grace" was not necessary to participation, and that participation might lead to grace unregenerate, men were admitted to the ministry on the basis of "sober minds and earnest intentions." (cf. Solomon Stoddard's sermon, "Appeal to the Learned, being a Vindication of the Rights of the Visible Saints to the Lord's Supper, though they be destitute of a Saving Work of God's Spirit on their Hearts." 1709.) In James Truslow Adams' Revolutionary New England, P. 38, is a discussion of the moral weaknesses of this period. He cites the ruling of a Connecticut church "that seven-months children should be considered legitimate and receive baptism."



eighty of God is one which affects the church differently at different times. The first Puritans, sure in their own hearts that they were the elect of God, found the doctrine necessary to sustain them in the tremendous struggles through which they passed. As the waves of the storm rose higher about them, they looked more and more to God, who was yet ruler above all the commotion of the elements, and would save his people. Hence the doctrine nerved them to greater activity; and it produced a similar effect, during the first period of the promulgation of Calvinism, among every nation which accepted the system. The Calvinists were the great active forces of an advancing Protestantism. But when such a mighty stimulus was removed, when inability was preached to men who were not conscious that they were the elect, when passive waiting for the glorious deliverance of God was inculcated upon men whom the tide of events no longer forced to activity in spite of themselves and of their theories, it produced sluggishness, apathy, self-distrust, despair. It has never been a good way to induce men to repent, to tell them that they cannot. Thus in part it was the theology of the period which wrought the paralysis which . . . continued in spite of all the ecclesiastical nostrums of the Half-Way Covenant and sunk the churches lower and lower."<sup>1</sup>

One may take exception to Foster's statement, "thus in part it was the theology of the period which wrought the paralysis . . .". Strictly speaking, it was not "the theology of the period" but "a part of the theology", which was emphasized and exaggerated, which wrought the paralysis. The doctrine of the inability of man to aid in his own

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F. H. Foster  
1. "American Journal of Theology." Vol. I, P. 715. Also Frank Hugh  
Foster. History of the New England Theology. P. 29.

salvation has always been an important part of the Christian theology, but its importance is that of a corrective doctrine in times when men are tempted to rely upon human effort alone. The inability of man can never be preached by itself, as a complete evangel. Prior to it, is the conviction that God is able; that salvation is a gift given freely and abundantly by God. Bellamy, in the next generation, was to see the havoc worked by the insistence on what man could not do, and he determined that the major emphasis of his preaching would be on what God had done, could do, and was ready now to do.

The situation would have been bad enough if limited to a distorted emphasis upon man's inability to work for his own salvation, but it was worse when men were told that they could do no good of any sort. The Colonists had only to look around them to see the results of heroic human effort, and instinctively they felt that the preaching they so often heard was unreal and untrue. In this untheological or unchristian form, the inability of man was preached until Jonathan Edwards showed that though man could do good and moral things, they counted for naught unless the heart was graciously disposed toward God - which was the work and gift of God himself.

Thus it was not the whole Calvinist theology, but one distorted aspect of it, that was urged until it was not only unprofitable preaching, but actually false. The exclusive preaching of man's inability, turned men's thoughts inwardly to search among their own inner forebodings for the help the preaching of God's graciousness would have abundantly provided. In the experience of Dr. Chalmers there was an incident that lightens up the all too prevalent difficulty in the religious life of

New England. Dr. Chalmers told a correspondent, "the truth is that your great error lies in making your comfort lie upon the question, Do I believe? when you should have made it turn upon the question, Is God willing to receive me into fellowship for Christ's sake?"<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that what was transpiring in New England was the substitution of a theology - at best a theology in its entirety; at worst, isolated parts of a theology - for religious experience. There are rhythms in religious faith; an ebb and flow; an "age of faith" and an "age of reason". There are times when the stream of religious faith and life runs strong and clear and vital. There are times when generations seem to be caught in a back-wash or in a stagnant pool. Something like this was true of New England during the years 1670-1730. The first generation of settlers had passed on their theology, but the flame, the warm and fructifying religious experience, out of which theology comes and in touch with which it must remain, flickered in the succeeding generations until Jonathan Edwards began his work.<sup>2</sup>

What was happening in New England was not an isolated phenomenon, however. There was a parallel occurrence in England and Scotland.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Life of Dr. Chalmers. Vol. II, P. 450. Quoted in Grace in the New Testament. P. 12, 13. James Moffatt.
  2. My notes indicate here a reference to A. Mitchell Hunter, The Teachings of Calvin. P. 291. The book is not at hand, and I do not recall the point of contact. It may be that he takes note of an ebb and flow of religious vitality.
  3. Donald Maclean. Aspects of Scottish Church History. P. 95.  
James McCosh. The Scottish Philosophy.  
Bernard Fay. Franklin, the Apostle of Modern Times. P. 89 (for England).

A third factor was the effect of immigration. (Maclean alludes to this in Aspects of Scottish Church History). In 1650, the population of New England was 52,000. In 1700, it was 275,000. As news of the New England colonies penetrated England, Scotland, Ireland, France and Germany, the "ne'er do well", the dissatisfied, the unsuccessful, and those in search of "adventure", came in larger proportions to those who were motivated by such motives that bore resemblance to those of the original colonists. Not all of those who came between 1650 and 1700, were of the less desirable quality, but at best they did not measure up to the first colonists in religious earnestness and conviction, altruism of purpose and educational equipment.

Under these circumstances the religious concerns of the "founding fathers" were no longer the dominant concerns of New England. While the churches still occupied an important place in the life of the people, there was evident an increasing resentment against the alliance between the churches and the civil government, and against the influence leading clergymen had in civic affairs. The new immigrants, and many descendents of the first colonists, did not share the enthusiasm of the first group for the practical responsibility which the churches took for the moral life of the people. The clergy had at first assumed roles of importance for the simple reason that they were usually the best educated men in the community and among the strongest leaders. For the most part, their importance was that of advisors with no formal or official authority. Yet they exercised considerable power. In this period - as both "Magnalia" and "Ratis Disciplinae" indicate - there was a rising opposition to the power of the clergy on the part of individuals and churches.

Illustrative of this spirit was a dispute incident to the use of ~~inn~~oculation for disease prevention which was championed by Cotton Mather and several other clergymen. Arrayed against the clerical supporters of innoculation was a group which called itself "The Society of Physicians Anti-Innoculator." One of the leaders of the group was a Doctor Douglas, a Scotsman who had studied at Paris, Leyden, and Edinburgh. He was the only man in the colonies with a doctor's diploma. "Because of his curious, active mind, his strict scientific training, his avowed radicalism, his opposition to the clergy and his colorful language, he was a sensation, attracting the attention of every one, and the sympathy of those who were dissatisfied."<sup>1</sup>

The group attacked the "~~Inn~~oculists", the clergy and the generally respectable elements in the city of Boston, in the "Boston Gazette" which was owned by James Franklin. The civil authorities finally sentenced James Franklin to imprisonment, but the newspaper continued under Benjamin Franklin. It is an interesting comment that Douglas as probably the best qualified physician in the Colonies knew little or nothing about the value of ~~inn~~oculation, and had opposed it chiefly because it had been advocated by Mather and a group of clergymen.<sup>2</sup> The "Society of Physicians ~~Inn~~oculator" had sworn "above all, to abuse Mather".<sup>3</sup> Here was evidence of a new spirit at work, and a rising anti-clericalism which denoted a process of secularization.

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1. Fay. Franklin, the Apostle of Modern Times. P. 25.

2. Fay. P. 26. Mather and his friends had innoculated more than 250 people in less than six months.

3. Fay. P. 27.

Not entirely unrelated to the anti-clerical, anti-church feeling - and a possible cause of that feeling - was an occurrence, or series of occurrences, relating to witch-craft. Belief in witch-craft was, of course, not limited to New England. The laws under which people had been put to death in Massachusetts and Connecticut, were counter-parts of the laws of the Mother-Country which were not repealed there until 1736.<sup>1</sup> The most notorious of the witch-craft cases occurred in Salem in 1692. There had been an epidemic of extremely violent cases, and in September of that year nineteen men and women were hanged. This action had been carried out by a special judicial commission appointed by the new Royal Governor, Sir William Phelps. There was a noticeable revulsion of feeling after these deaths, and especially against "the habit of mind by which it had been made possible" and against the Mathers, though notably Cotton, who were held responsible for the fostering of these views. The consternation slowly abated, and some of the judicial commission followed the example of Samuel Sewal, and publicly acknowledged that they had been in error. The government of Massachusetts, in appointing a Fast-day in January, 1696, "prayed the divine forgiveness for whatever mistake has been fallen into." In 1711, pecuniary compensation was given to the heirs of the victims.

So strong was the feeling over this incident that when Cotton Mather believed he had discovered, sometime later, a genuine case of demoniac possession in Boston, his views were attacked by a prominent merchant, and the vigorous discussion of the matter led to renewed criticism of what had taken place earlier. The church was not responsible

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1. Walker. P. 197.

for this incident, but it suffered nevertheless in loss of prestige.

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What was really happening during the latter decades of the seventeenth century and the opening decades of the eighteenth century, was not only a decline in religious vitality and a slackening of the moral standards, but a disintegration of the culture established by the first settlers.

James Truslow Adams has distinguished three cultural periods in American life.<sup>1</sup> "First, that characterized by a purely translated growth, . . . Next, the short period of extreme declension and of hesitation succeeding upon the withering of this imported culture, and thirdly, the period of a native born one." Clearly, the period under survey comprises the latter part of the first period and the entire second period.

In the changed and changing social conditions we can detect three movements which explain and cause both the change in piety and religious zeal, and the larger fact of the disintegration of the original New England tradition. These three movements are : (1) the breakdown of Puritanism; (2) a contracting of the intellectual outlook; and (3) an expanding secular interest.

It must be said parenthetically, that this was a time of political and constitutional uncertainty for the Colonies. In 1684, the English Court of Chancery declared the Massachusetts Charter vacated. The

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1. J. T. Adams. A History of American Life. P. 258. Vol. 3. Provincial Society.

confused and rapidly changing political situation in England only added to the uncertainty in New England. When at last Massachusetts was given another charter, the relationship of the churches to the state was an entirely changed one. Not only was the financial support of the churches changed, but now other denominations and churches could enter upon what had been previously a solely Congregational territory.

A series of wars followed, in which New England engaged on the side of the Mother-Country; often feeling the brunt of the French force mediated through their Indian allies. All this was a background to the changes which were taking place in the mind of New England.

(1) Puritanism had been supreme in early New England because it was so thoroughly indigenous with the first settlers. It was not an accidental, second-thought, or inherited mode of life, but the central fact of the religious, moral, and intellectual outlook of the people. Moreover, Puritanism fitted naturally and easily, the peculiar circumstances of the adventure of establishing colonies in a new country. But when the character of the people had changed as a result of immigration, and when the peculiar nature of the every-day life of the people had changed when the tasks of pioneering were well in hand, Puritanism became almost as strange as it had once been natural and inevitable. The very strenuousness which the task of crossing the ocean and planting colonies demanded, and which Calvinism and Puritanism inculcated, was now, with a less homogeneous people, and a changed outward situation, a strain.

We have already noticed the theological inadequacy of the New England tradition, in relation to the doctrine of the inability of man,



and we have seen that the Half-Way Covenant was an ineffective solution to a problem that was to a certain extent the result of a compromise between the Pilgrim-Separatist idea of churches of "believers only" and the Puritan idea of a State-church. But in another sense, Puritanism carried the seed of its own decay. Puritanism, as well as primitive Calvinism, carried within itself two alternate tendencies - one toward individualism, and one toward socialism.<sup>1</sup>

Or, this might be put in another way. The Calvinist emphasis upon the personal relationship between God and man, established by God for his own glory, makes for a "spiritual aristocracy" but a political and social democracy, and from these either individualism or socialism, or both, are possible results. In New England, the alternative of individualism was the more natural, because of the frontier condition and the fact of isolated communities. And the individualism thus encouraged, worked to destroy the close relationship of the church to the state and the power of the church and religion over the affairs of individual men and of society.

The break-down of Puritanism, in which the central element was the Calvinist theology, meant the destruction of the unity of New England culture.

(2) The second movement at work was the contracting intellectual outlook. In the early life of New England not many facts are more compelling of notice than that the leadership of the colonies was characterized

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1. cf. R. H. Tawney. Religion and Rise of Capitalism. P. 113. and W. A. Visser 'T Hooft. The Background of the Social Gospel in America. P. 81.

by the highest intellectual training and competence. While this may have been truer of the clergy than of the laity,<sup>1</sup> the laity also represented a high degree of education. Many of the leaders, clerical and lay, were graduates of Cambridge and Oxford, and those who could afford it, sent their sons to England to be educated. From the beginning of the colonies, however, the need for schools and colleges here, for the training of ministers especially, was felt, and Harvard College was founded only six years after the Puritans came to Salem in 1630. But laudable as were both the vision and the practical effort, it was impossible to achieve in a few years, and in the face of such difficult circumstances, an adequate educational system. Thus it was inevitable that the second and third generations should be distinctly less well educated than the original colonists. In addition, the task of building the necessary physical shell of civilization, the erection of military defenses, and many other items incident to subduing a new continent, left little time or energy for the cultivation of mental life. And inevitably the virtues and abilities connected with the pioneer life were exalted over the virtues of a more settled civilization.

As settlements were pushed further back into the wilderness, transportation and communication became more difficult. There were few roads, few newspapers, and the Fatherland was months away by sailing vessel, and even further away in the interest of those who had been born in New England. Though the sea-board towns were more fortunate in their proximity to other towns, and to sources of news and information, the

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1. M. C. Tyler. History of American Literature. Vol. II, P. 93.

intellectual situation was bleak at best. On the frontiers, it was necessarily worse.

New England, in the second, third and fourth generations, was a distinctly less cultured place than in the first generation. Parrington has given a fairly accurate picture, even if it makes little allowance for the difference between the sea-board communities and those further inland. "It is not pleasant to linger in the drab later years of a century that in its prime had known able men and accomplished notable things. A world that accepted Michael Wigglesworth for its poet, and accounted Cotton Mather its most distinguished man of letters, had certainly backslidden in the ways of culture. The final harvest of the theocracy must be reckoned somewhat scanty. English Independency had been the robust and rebellious child of a great age; New England Puritanism was the stunted off-spring of a petty environment. With the passing of the emigrant generation, a narrow provincialism settled upon the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Bay. Not a single notable book appeared; scarcely a generous figure emerged from the primitive background. A thin soil and the law of Moses created a capable but ungainly race, prosaic and niggardly. Their very speech lost much of the native English beauty that had come down from medieval times. The clear and expressive idiom that Bunyon caught from the lips of English villagers, with its echoes of a more spontaneous life before the Puritan middle class had substituted asceticism for beauty, grew thinner and more meager, its bright homespun dyes subdued to a dun butternut. The town records which in the first years had been set down in dignified and adequate phrase became increasingly crabbed and illiterate, laboriously composed by plain men to whom spelling had become a lost art. The horizons of life in New England were

contracting to a narrow round of chores and sermons."<sup>1</sup>

(3) A third aspect of the changing social scene against which the decay of the higher life of the Colonies is to be seen, is the expanding secularism. It is now a familiar observation that modern capitalism is closely connected to some of the forces which also encouraged the rise of Protestantism, and particularly Calvinism.<sup>2</sup> This association can be seen in New England. Among even the earliest settlers there is a concern for and interest in the things of commerce that is surprising. "If one goes to Bradford's History or his letter-book, expecting to find much light upon the shades of religious beliefs of the Pilgrim Fathers he will be very much disappointed. For one page upon such themes, he will find by actual computation some twenty-five pages on trading conditions, on the relations to the English Company, and the commercial needs of the little colony."<sup>3</sup> Later the trader-interest became so intensified as to mark a fundamental shift in the thought patterns of the colonists.

From the diary of an observant Dutch trader we have some indication of the way in which Boston was losing its former character as a "city devoted to religion" and was becoming a worldly, commercial seaport. In 1680, Jasper Danckaerts wrote: "Nevertheless you discover little difference between this and other places. Drinking and fighting occur there not less than elsewhere; and as to truth and true Godliness, you must not expect more of them than of others. When we were there, four ministers' sons were learning the silversmith's trade."<sup>4</sup>

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1. V. L. Parrington. Main Currents in American Thought. Vol. I, P. 85.

2. cf. R. H. Tawney. Religion and the Rise of Capitalism. and Max Weber. Same title.

3. T. C. Hall. P. 92.

4. Quoted by Wright. Literary Culture In Early New England. P. 157.

Wright, who quotes Danckaerts, writes that "there were nearly a score of silversmiths working at their trade in Boston before the end of the (17th) century. Many of the things they wrought were necessary articles but the rapid growth in their number toward the end of the period, as well as the examples of their work which have been preserved, indicate that Boston afforded a good market for luxuries. That four ministers' sons at once were turning to this lucrative work instead of preparing to follow in the footsteps of their fathers, shows the tendency of the time."<sup>1</sup>

The stern Puritan virtues of hard work and frugality, and no frivolity, made for material success as well as for attentiveness to the things of religion. And wealth, as the prophets and saints have always known, lead not only to irreligion, but first to the secularization of thought and action. "The Puritans, in short, were gradually becoming urban, cosmopolitan, and civilized."<sup>2</sup>

During the last quarter of the seventeenth century personal fortunes of a larger nature were becoming more numerous and the "Reforming Synod" of 1679 found one of the causes of the lack of godliness to be the "inordinate affection for the world, showing itself in too great a desire for landed estates, leading men to forsake Churches and Ordinances, and to live like Heathen, only that so they might have Elbow-room enough in the World; causing others to sell goods at excessive rates, still others to demand unreasonable wages, and inclining many to slack-handedness

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1. T. G. Wright. Literary Culture In Early New England. P. 157.
  2. Koch. Republican Religion. P. 5. cf. also J. T. Adams. Revolutionary New England. Pp. 138-169 for effect of rising commercialism.

as to Publick concernments."<sup>1</sup>

In the first quarter of the eighteenth century there are evidences that wealth was increasing even more rapidly. "Thomas Amory, a Boston merchant who died in 1728, at the age of forty-five, left an estate valued at 20,000 pounds, without counting his property in Carolina and the Azores. A little later, Peter Faneuil, had accumulated a fortune sufficient to allow of having 14,000 pounds of Bank of England stock as well as other stocks and bonds in the home country."<sup>2</sup>

With the growth in wealth there was a growth in class consciousness, social distinctions, and snobbishness, particularly in the older cities and towns. These conditions were accentuated by the forced withdrawal of people from the outposts and frontiers due to the hostility of the Indians. As they were forced back into the towns, the rustic qualities developed in the individualized and unconventional life of the frontier ill-prepared them for equal association with their urban fellows.

The concern with social distinctions made its way into religious life, especially with regard to seating in the churches. "Perhaps snobbishness has never been more rampant anywhere in America than it was in the Puritan villages of New England, where it received an added and ugly twist of 'Phariseeism'."<sup>3</sup> Where their fathers had been concerned with the religious experience of a candidate, at this period "age, estate, place and qualification" were weighed with a meticulous care in settling the conflicting claims of families for the pews of first honor.

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1. Dexter. P. 478

2. J. T. Adams. Revolutionary New England. P. 115.

3. J. T. Adams. A History of American Life. P. 87.

"Infinite were the rulings giving each seat its specific social rank, such as that the 'fore seat in the front gallery shall be equall in dignity with the second seat in the body'."<sup>1</sup> So concerned had these descendents of the first democratic and simple colonists become with aristocratic distinctions that the presidents of the colleges had to arrange the freshman classes each year according to social rank.<sup>2</sup>

The expanding secular interest of this period is illustrated by two further changes. In 1685, a Boston bookseller receiver from England a shipment of eight hundred and seventy-four books, seven hundred and fifty of which were either school texts or religious books. By the opening of the new century, "the power of the clergy over the book market" had visibly declined, for people were demanding "a different sort of literary fare, and the taste of New England was becoming more liberal."<sup>3</sup>

Again, there is a shift in the relative importance attached to the vocation of the ministry as over against the other professions. Previously, the ministry overshadowed any vocation both in regard to the respect that was accorded it and in the number of men of outstanding ability that entered it. Gradually new careers were opened and intellectual activity began to flow in broader channels. John Adams illustrates the effect produced by the changed environment. When he was twenty years of age he made the following entry in his diary: "The following questions may be answered some time or other, namely, - where do we find a precept

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1. J. T. Adams. A History of American Life. P. 87. Vol. 3.
  2. Franklin B. Dexter. "Massachusetts Historical Papers."
  3. J. T. Adams. Revolutionary New England. P. 33.

in the Gospel requiring Ecclesiastical Synods? Convocations? Councils? Decrees? Creeds? Confessions? Oathes? And whole cart-loads of other trumpery that we find religion encumbered with in these days?"<sup>1</sup> Such men became lawyers, doctors or merchants; theology ceased to occupy their minds.

It is well now to scrutinize the ground we have transversed in this chapter. We have traced the development of the religious life of New England through the church Synods until 1662, when the Half-Way Covenant was adopted. We noted a decay in piety and morals which the "Reforming" Synod of 1679 attempted to arrest. We attempted to see the decay of morals and piety against a background of changing social conditions in which we noted the causative factors of a change in the character of the immigrants, the decline of Puritanism, the contracting intellectual outlook, and an expanding secular interest. What we have seen happen, in other words, is nothing less than a transition from a culture characterized by a homogeneous population unified by a common religious and theological outlook, to a culture in which the people are heterogeneous in race, religion and purposes - a culture in which a common religious and theological outlook is not the governing ideal, but in which religion is simply one element.

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1. Quoted in Brooks Adams. The Emancipation of Massachusetts. P. 316.



### Chapter III

#### Arminianism, the Great Awakening, and the Consequent Theological Dissent

The conditions described in the last chapter created a situation favorable to the rise and growth of theological dissent and divergence. This favorable condition existed not only because the religious condition of New England was weakened, dissipated and compromised, but also because the unity of culture which enabled us to speak of a religious tradition rather than several religious traditions, had now to a large extent disappeared.

In addition to these local conditions, there was another factor. After the beginning of the eighteenth century there was a noticeable increase in the intellectual traffic and commerce between old and New England. This is evident not only in the decreased number of sermons and religious tracts relative to the number of other types of publications brought into the Colonies, but also in the marked increase in the number of all sorts of other books, but especially philosophical and controversial works. To a remarkable degree New England was touched, after 1700, by the ferment in the areas of philosophy and theology, which was working in England and the Continent. Thus from 1700 to 1750, the Arminian tendencies which were evident in England, made their appearance in New England too, and something of the same sequence of Arminianism - Latitudinarianism - Arianism - Deism - Unitarianism - can be traced in the Colonies.<sup>1</sup>

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1. F. H. Foster. A History of New England Theology. P. 7.

What may be considered as a forerunner or herald of the subsequent departures from orthodox Calvinism, was rationalism. The rise of rationalism in New England was quiet, unobtrusive and casual. It did not at first challenge orthodoxy or revelation, but rather was used to elucidate and defend orthodoxy and revelation. Its growth can be seen as an increased reliance upon and use of reason by those who were not conscious of having given an unwarranted place to it, or of having set reason in juxtaposition to faith and revelation. Nevertheless this harmless use of reason was not unrelated to a widening and deepening stream which was to wash the shores of the island of theological orthodoxy.

It is an interesting, and revealing, fact that two of the most important representatives of Puritan Calvinism - Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards - made a use of reason that, while not raising it to a point of superiority to faith, gave it, nevertheless, an importance not hitherto accorded it in New England thought. (cf. Cotton Mather's "The Wonders of the Invisible World etc." and Jonathan Edwards' "Dissertation Concerning the End for which God Created the World.") Of the latter, A. C. McGiffert, Jr. says: "Quite as characteristic of Edwards as this careful laying out in advance of the objectives of the discussion and even more significant was his general approach to the subject. The opening sentence of the first chapter after the introduction struck the key-note: 'In the first place I would observe some things which reason seems to indicate in this matter.' Not revelation first, as might have been expected, but reason. Before he turned, like a good Calvinist, to Scripture to learn what is God's chief end in the creation of the world, he tried to think it out for himself; and unlike a good Calvinist he

believed he had succeeded. Now this is the accent of modernity. It is no new accent to those who have read his psychological writings."<sup>1</sup>

Samuel Johnson, a contemporary of Jonathan Edwards at Yale College, was distinctly less orthodox, and reveals even more pronouncedly the rationalistic influence. In his "Introduction to Philosophy", published in 1731, he made the chief end of God to be the happiness of man, instead of making it man's chief end to glorify God.<sup>2</sup> "The great end that above all things that concerns us," he wrote again, "is that we be truly happy in the whole of our nature and duration."<sup>3</sup> Continually he preached and wrote against both determinism and the "horror, despair, and gloomy apprehension" of predestination - "an unreasonable doctrine."<sup>4</sup>

In 1726, Cotton Mather wrote: "I cannot learn that among all the Pastors of Two Hundred Churches, there is one Arminian; much less an Arian, or a Gentilist."<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, even before this date a spirit was already at work which savoured more of European rationalism than of the Calvinism of John Robinson, and though that spirit had not yet become articulate enough to give direct challenge, it was beginning to manifest itself in many ways, even in Mather himself.<sup>6</sup>

It is not entirely clear how or when Arminianism first gained entrance into New England, or how rapidly and widely it gained headway.

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1. A. C. McGiffert, Jr. Jonathan Edwards. P. 172.
  2. W. Riley in Cambridge History of American Literature. Vol. I, P. 82.
  3. Cited by Riley. American Philosophy. P. 69.
  4. Riley. American Philosophy. Pp. 72 ff.; Cambridge History of American Literature. Vol. I, Pp. 82 ff. Cf. J. T. Adams. Revolutionary New England for references to rationalism in the colleges.
  5. Quoted by Walker. A History of the Congregational Churches. P. 216.
  6. cf. Riley. American Philosophy. P. 195.

By 1720, "the impression was abroad (Cotton Mather to the contrary notwithstanding) that many both in the ministry and the churches, were in greater or less sympathy with this style of thought."<sup>1</sup> By 1740, there were many traces of it, and many accusations were made against ministers alleged to be Arminian. So keen and honest an observer as Jonathan Edwards thought Arminianism was "prevailing" and he was led to devote his principle writings to opposing it.<sup>2</sup>

By 1700, Arminianism had made great in-roads into English non-conformity and Arianism was not far behind. Intimated in the writings of Milton and Locke, it was definitely advocated in print in 1702, by Thomas Emlyn, in his "Humble Inquiry into the Scripture Account of Jesus Christ." This book was re-published in New England in 1756, by an anonymous layman at Boston, who challenged anyone to disprove its Arian teachings from the Scripture. It was the first anti-trinitarian book published in America. Undoubtedly this book was read in New England before it was published here.

William Whiston further popularized the Arminian - Arian position in his "Primitive Christianity Revived" of 1711, and Samuel Clarke's "Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity" (1712) made the position still more widely known. So rapidly and widely had Arminianism and Arianism spread among both the established and non-conformist clergy of England by 1750, that English Presbyterianism was prevailingy Arian.

In addition to Whiston and Clarke, two other English writers

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1. Foster. History of New England Theology. P. 42.

2. cf. A. C. McGiffert, Jr. Jonathan Edwards. P. 154 ff.

had written books which were widely read in New England. They were Daniel Whitby and John Taylor. Whitby, (1638-1726) who spent the last half-century of his life as an Anglican rector at Salisbury, began his ministry as a Calvinist, but passed into Arminianism and finally, under the influence of Clarke, into Arianism. In 1710, he published a "Discourse" on the five Calvinist points which rejected each point as unscriptural and untrue. This work was republished four times, and was regarded as an almost unanswerable argument in support of Arminian views.

John Taylor (1694-1761) - even more influential than Whitby - was a Presbyterian Arian of Norwich, whose "The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin" ran through five editions. It attacked and repudiated the doctrine named in the title. His "The Scripture Doctrine of Atonement" was of the same nature. The influence of Taylor's writings was felt in Scotland and New England as well as in England. John Wesley wrote that he met with Taylor's writings everywhere, and Jonathan Edwards said that no work did so much toward the rooting out of the underlying ideas in the Puritan theology.<sup>1\*2</sup>

The writings of the English Arminians and Arians were read in New England and found in the libraries of ministers and colleges. How

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1. cf. W. G. Tarrant. P. 57. and Walker. History of the Congregational Churches. P. 269 ff.

2. The terms "Arminian", "Arian", "Unitarian" were loosely used in the controversies of this time. "Arminian" and "Arian" were frequently used to denote the same thing. And this despite the fact that earliest Arminianism in New England was perceptibly different from the Arminianism of the Holland Remonstrants. Frequently it was a much more negative thing in America; a sort of "catch-all" for those who were reacting on any score against Calvinism. Cf. Walker. History of the Congregational Churches. P. 269.

rapid the rise of the more extreme departures from Calvinism would have been here is of course beside the point. For from 1734 until 1745, the whole religious life of New England was caught and held by a revival; or series of revivals, that arrested the growth of liberalism, and temporarily off-set it by imparting new vitality to the forces of orthodoxy.

Revivals of religion were not unknown in New England, but they had been previously of a local and sporadic nature. In 1734, in Northampton, under Jonathan Edwards, the first of a wave of revivals which constitute "The Great Awakening", started. This was of a different nature than any previous movement, not only because it went deeper and wider into the life of New England and America, but because it was contemporaneous with a movement that was international in scope. In Germany it was connected with Pietism, and in England it was the Evangelical movement under the Wesleys.

The start of the Great Awakening was in a series of sermons preached by Edwards in the winter of 1734, in which he set forth the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He urged upon his hearers the duty of immediate repentance, but denied that any action, however good in itself, of an "unconverted man" laid any claim upon divine justice or the promises of grace.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the revival started by this series of sermons, three hundred people in Northampton were said to have undergone a regenerative experience before it abated in 1735. The impulse spread through

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1. cf. Walker. History of the Congregational Churches. P. 255 ff. and McGiffert. Jonathan Edwards. P. 41 ff., for fuller discussion.

the Connecticut valley and to the other colonies. News of these events reached England, and it was at the request of some people there that Edwards wrote his "Narrative of the Surprising Word of God", which was printed on both sides of the Atlantic.

In 1739 and 1740, another wave of revivalism broke out, this time among the Presbyterians of New Jersey. In 1740, George Whitefield, making his second visit to America, came to New England. Six years of intense interest prepared the ground for his reception by large crowds comprising all classes of people. In many cities and towns the crowds over taxed the largest assembling-places, and overflowed onto the village green. Everywhere Whitefield gripped his audiences in an extraordinary way; men wept, women fainted, and under his oratory they "melted", and thousands professed conversion.

The Great Awakening was by no means the work of Edwards and Whitefield; they were but two of the best known leaders. Gilbert Tennant, the Presbyterian from New Jersey, was active in New England; Jonathan Parsons, Benjamin Pomeroy, Joseph Bellamy and Eleazer Wheelock, were a few of the others who exercised leadership in the movement.

Something of the intense feeling aroused by the Great Awakening is evident in these two quotations. "On October 13, 1740, Whitefield left Boston, kissed and wept over by Governor Belcher, who had been among the foremost to do him honor; and his hearers were as wax in his hands, as he journeyed by way of Concord, Worcester, Brookfield, etc."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Walker. History of the Congregational Churches. P. 257.

"When Mr. Whitefield first arrived here the whole town was alarmed . . . The conventicles were crowded; but he chose rather our Common, where multitudes might see him in all his awful postures; besides that, in one crowded conventicle, before he came in, six were killed in a fright."<sup>1</sup>

The deep interest aroused and the quickening of the religious life which came with the Great Awakening are evidence that the churches had not been a creative force in the life of the time. That our analysis of the causes of this condition as due in part to the fact that the preaching was concerned, not with advocating and proclaiming a gospel and testifying to an experience, but with perpetuating a theological system - and not even a complete one - is accurate, can be seen from the fact that the work of Edwards had been so effective. He was in no sense an orator. He read his sermons, leaning upon one elbow. He spoke simply and made few gestures. But from unfriendly critic as well as from warm admirer, is the word that the dominant thing about Edwards was the intensity of his Christian convictions and the genuineness of his religious experience.

A. C. McGiffert, Jr. has said that the Great Awakening "definitely and permanently changed the face of the American scene."<sup>2</sup> But the results were not all good. The movement became plagued by the excesses of its friends as much as by the opposition of its critics. Not least responsible for the antagonism which emerged was George Whitefield himself. Soon after his first successes Whitefield began to exhibit a

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1. Quoted in Brooks Adams. The Emancipation of Massachusetts. P. 332.

2. McGiffert. Jonathan Edwards. P. 60.



censorious spirit. In a gathering in Old South meeting-house, in Boston, he declared that "the generality of preachers talk of an unknown and unfelt Christ; and the reason why congregations have been so dead is, because they have dead men preaching to them."<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly Whitefield had singled out a factor of capital importance in the decline of the church, but his handling of the situation was ill-calculated to correct the fault. When he visited Edwards at Northampton, Edwards felt it necessary to remonstrate with him for giving too great heed to "impulses" as "evidence of regeneration in his hearers" and for "judging other persons to be unconverted." Whitefield, however, continued as before. He recorded in his journal that at Suffield, Connecticut, "many ministers were present. I did not spare them."<sup>2</sup> On another occasion he referred to the New England clergy, without troubling to qualify his statement, as "dumb dogs, half devils and half beasts, unconverted, spiritually blind and leading their people to hell."<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt that a great many people were converted under Whitefield's preaching and that a large proportion of the students preparing for the ministry were influenced by him. At one time there were not less than twenty ministers in the vicinity of Boston who considered him the means of their conversion.<sup>4</sup> But when he returned to New England in 1744, he found strong opposition not only to his methods, but to the whole phenomenon of revivalism. The "Old Light" party, the conservatives, gave him warning of their opposition. His published

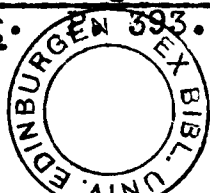
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1. Walker. A History of the Congregational Churches. P. 257.

2. Walker. Ibid. P. 258.

3. W. G. Tarrant. The Story and Significance of the Unitarian Movement. P. 59.

4. Tracy. The Great Awakening. 393.



comments on the religious life and leaders of New England closed the doors of Harvard and Yale to him. And as he moved from town to town, he found many a pulpit once open to him, now closed.<sup>1</sup>

Revivalism, however, was attended by other and more serious abuses than the shortcomings of Whitefield. At a time when a distinctly emotional type of preaching and experience was regarded with favor, it was not strange that these characteristics that surrounded that sort of religious experience should be in greater demand than the thoughtful reflection of a minister who was a counsellor and pastor. Ministers who had had some success in revival preaching ceased the regular work of the pastorate and gave themselves to itinerant preaching in other localities, either with or without the invitation of the settled ministers. Individuals who had undergone deep emotional changes were led from testifying to preaching with no other preparation than their own immediate impulses and no other message than their own experience. Typical of this sort of thing was the case of "Rev. James Davenport of Southold, Long Island, in regard to whom Whitefield, who was not conspicuous as a judge of character, had declared 'that of all men living he knew of none who kept a closer walk with God.' Excited by the revivals, he journeyed through Connecticut and Massachusetts, haranging large audiences in words of impassioned exhortation or denunciation, charging ministers who opposed him with being 'unconverted' and 'leading their people blindfold to Hell.' Wherever he went the scene of his preaching was almost a riot. At New London, in 1743, he built a fire of the books of Flavel,

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1. cf. Walker. A History of Congregational Churches. P. 265 ff.

Beveridge, Increase Mather, and others, and declared to his followers that as smoke arose from this pyre 'so the smoke of the torment of such of their authors as died in the same belief was now ascending in hell.' So extravagant was Davenport that the Connecticut legislature and a Boston jury, both of which took legal cognizance of his actions, pronounced him mentally unbalanced; and it is charitable to suppose that their view was correct."<sup>1</sup>

When steps were taken to control itinerant preaching, in a few cases new "separatist" churches were organized which rejected the Half-Way Covenant, dispensed with ordained clergymen, "prepared" sermons, and honored the visions and testimonies of those who were distinctive for their spiritual intuitions. On the other side, members of such "separatist" churches were forced to pay taxes for the support of the regular churches; students at Yale were forbidden to attend "separatist" churches, and in 1741, the trustees of the college voted that "if any Student of this College shall directly or indirectly say that the Rector, either of the Trustees or Tutors are Hypocrites, carnall or unconverted Men, he Shall for the first Offense make a publick Confession in the Hall, for the Second Offence be expelled."<sup>2</sup>

It is not easy to evaluate the results of the Great Awakening on the positive side. McGiffert says: "It definitely and permanently changed the face of the American scene. Every community quivered with new life. Among its outstanding effects were the growth of a new human-

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1. Walker. op. cit., P. 260.

2. Quoted by Alice Baldwin. The New England Clergy and the American Revolution. P. 60.

itarianism and missionary interest, the rise of the large denominations, and the impetus given to popular education."<sup>1</sup> Estimates of the number converted and brought into the church vary from 25,000 persons to 50,000. Professor Walker, however, is of the opinion that the number is considerably below 50,000. But quite aside from the number actually brought into the church, must be reckoned the religious quickening and recreation which came to those already in the churches. Jonathan Edwards was led to conclude: "Never, I believe, was so much done in confessing injuries and making up differences as the last year. The tavern was soon empty. . . . People had done with their old quarrels, backbitings and intermeddling with other men's matters."<sup>2</sup>

On the negative side, the results are more easily recognized, and from our point of view, equally as far-reaching. The intense feeling engendered for and against the Great Awakening was productive of strife and disunity in the churches. And while it did quicken the religious life of New England, it also favored a type of emotional religion in which truth and proximity to the historic evangel of Christianity was less important than the degree and intensity of religious feeling. In a series of books,<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Edwards sought to deal with the problems arising out of the revival, and to separate the wheat from the chaff. But Edwards was unable to prevent the abuses which attended the movement, nor could he prevent the conclusion being drawn that the abuses were an inevitable part of an approach to religion in which feeling and emotion,

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1. McGiffert. Jonathan Edwards. P. 60.

2. McGiffert. Ibid. P. 55.

3. "Distinguishing Marks of the Work of the Spirit of God", 1741.  
"Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England", 1742.  
"Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections", 1746.

as such, played a dominant role. The development and approval of the strategy of revivalism to which the Great Awakening led, was one of its most permanent fruits, and we must say, not a fruit that may be considered desirable. It may not be strictly accurate to say with R. E. Thompson that the Great Awakening "terminated the Puritan and inaugurated the Pietist or Methodist Age of American Church history"<sup>1</sup>, but the essential theological assumption of Revivalism and its practical methods were incompatible with Puritanism.

By far, the most important negative result of the Great Awakening was the doctrinal controversy and theological dissent of which it was the occasion.<sup>2</sup> The first division was between the "New Lights" and the "Old Lights". In the Presbyterian Churches in the Middle Atlantic Colonies the groups were known as the "New Sides" and the "Old Sides". In New England the "New Lights" were the supporters of the Great Awakening and included the Calvinists led by Jonathan Edwards, who developed a modified Calvinism which is known as the "New England Theology". The "Old Lights" included both the stricter Calvinists and the liberals who were tinged with Arminianism and Arianism. The alignment, however, of the Old Calvinists and the Arminian-Arian Liberals, under the banner of "Old Lights" was informal and short-lived. Their only point of agreement was a common opposition to the Great Awakening. Eventually, the Old Calvinists and the Arminian-Arian Liberals separated and the Old Calvinists became an comparatively unimportant center bloc between the two extremes, as the Liberals went on to become, two generations later, the Unitarians.

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1. Thompson. History of the Presbyterian Churches In the U. S. A. P. 34.

2. Walker. History of the Congregational Churches. P. 266.

## Chapter IV

### The Growth of Liberalism

From the Great Awakening to the Period of the Revolution.

#### Appendix on The Episcopal Church

We have seen in the preceeding chapter how the Great Awakening arrested for the moment the decline of the Calvinist or orthodox group, and checked temporarily the growth of the liberal group. The excesses of the Great Awakening, however, brought disrepute to its followers, and created disputes which led finally to the formation of theological groups or parties. Immediately following the Great Awakening, therefore, the forces and figures were consolidated and brought together to a degree that had not hitherto been the case, and liberalism entered one of its most rapid periods of growth.

It must not be made to appear as if the Great Awakening was the sole or only cause of the new burst of interest in liberalism. We have already noted briefly that the writings of Thomas Emlyn, Daniel Whitby, William Whiston, Samuel Clark, John Taylor and others who represented English Arminianism and Arianism, were rather widely read in New England, and even more frequently read after the Great Awakening. With some the Great Awakening was simply a cause of discontent and dissatisfaction with orthodoxy; with others it was the incident that sealed their dissatisfaction, and now definitely prompted them to seek something else. Perhaps it would be most accurate to say that the Great Awakening was both a causative factor and the precipitating occasion of a new interest in liberalism.

In the period immediately following the Great Awakening several

New England clergymen emerged as open and avowed champions of attitudes and points of view directly opposed to many of the chief tenets of Calvinism. Hitherto the New England leaders who bore the stamp of liberalism were noteworthy chiefly as spokesmen for points of view of other men. Now appeared a growing group who, while willing to accept and use the authority of learned European thinkers to justify their own opinions, were now quite ready to attack orthodoxy on the basis of the inherent reasonableness of the attack itself. Dissent had become not only more open and wide-spread, it was braver, more out-spoken, more self-confident; more a repudiation of Calvinism as a whole and less a dissent from one or two tenets of Calvinism.

In these new stages of the revolt against orthodoxy, several men stand out as leaders of the liberal movement to whom attention must be given.

First of all, Charles Chauncey; first not by virtue of his ultimate significance, but by virtue of the fact that his liberalism more closely focuses on the issues which the Great Awakening brought forth.

Charles Chauncey was minister of the First Church in Boston from 1727 to 1787. He was an ardent patriot with a strong sense of things American, and a ready controversialist who participated fully and freely in the public discussion of the issues of the day, both political and theological.

Chauncey's favorite authors were the English liberals, Whitby, Whiston, Clarke and Taylor, and he corresponded regularly and frequently with a group of English Arians. Previous to 1735, Chauncey had shown

signs of more or less mild departures from the orthodox scheme. In some of his earliest sermons in First Church there are vague suggestions of the point of view which he was afterward to formulate definitely in his "Salvation of All Men" (1784) in which he rejected the doctrine of eternal punishment. There are likewise traces in his early sermons of his unorthodox attitude toward the Fall and Original Sin, an attitude which he finally presented in 1785 in "Five Dissertations on the Scripture Account of the Fall and Consequences."

But it was the Great Awakening that marked his first clear break with the Orthodox system - a break which was as much emotional as theological, and Chauncey achieved notice first as the strongest critic of revivalism. In 1742 was published his "Enthusiasm Described and Cautioned Against." This title reveals that at first Chauncey's attitude was one of concern and apprehension. The cause for his concern and apprehension may be seen from one of his sermons, "The Late Religious Commotions in New England", an answer to the Rev. Jonathan Edwards. "It is certainly an exceeding difficult Time with us. Such an enthusiastic, factious, censorious Spirit was never known here. . . . A vain conceited Temper prevails. Children can teach their Parents and their Ministers. Every low-bred illiterate Person can resolve cases of Conscience, and settle the most difficult Points of Divinity, better than most learned Divines. A learned Ministry is despised by many, and Seminaries of Literature are spoken against as injurious to Religion."

But if it were only the emotional excesses, the "enthusiasm", the censorious spirit, the deprecation of education and learning which first aroused Chauncey, his apprehension soon grew into opposition to the doctrines which he thought lay beneath these outward marks of re-



vivalism, and his "Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England" (1743) marks the widening and deepening, not only of an emotional gulf, but also of a theological gulf. Some indication of the strength of Chauncey's reputation as the leader of the opposition to the Great Awakening and its supporting group, may be seen in the fact that there were 1100 subscriptions for his "Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England" before it was published.

In this work there is not only the reluctance to accept the idea of eternal damnation and punishment, but a large skepticism touching the whole concept of salvation as held by the traditional Calvinists. This work, in its doctrinal aspects, is important not because of the conclusions to which it comes, but for the questions which it raises, and the reliance upon "reason" and the "reasonable" which it evidences. In it Chauncey shifted, as Prof. Schneider points out, "the whole basis of argument from the idea of revelation to the idea of reason."<sup>1</sup>

A second important figure in this period was Dr. Ebenezer Gay, for seventy years (1717-87) the pastor of the church at Hingham, Massachusetts. Dr. Sprague, in his "Annals of the American Pulpit", records the lives of forty-nine ministers of known Unitarian belief settled in Congregational Churches about the middle of the 18th century. The list begins with the name of Dr. Ebenezer Gay, who has been called "the father of American Unitarianism."<sup>2</sup> Gay hardly warrants this designation, however. More accurate is the designation, "one of the early precursors

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1. Herbert Schneider. The Puritan Mind. P. 157.

2. J. H. Allen. A History of the Unitarians. P. 175. American Church History. Vol. X.

of Unitarianism."<sup>1</sup> For while it is said<sup>2</sup> that Gay ceased to believe in the Trinity after 1750, his thinking was not oriented in terms of Unitarianism. He was not so ready to participate in controversy as Chauncey, or so bold and outspoken as his more famous pupil, Jonathan Mayhew, yet in his quiet way he had a marked influence in preparing the ground for the acceptance of liberal views and in spreading them.

Two points in the thinking of Gay are important in this connection. First, his opposition to creedal statements. In a convention sermon before the ministers of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in 1746, he urged freedom of inquiry and decried the use of man-made creeds and man-made articles of faith. The minister, he said, is ordained to propagate and advance pure and undefiled religion. "A pure Spirit searches impartially after Truth, and is best capable of discovering it: Being free from those corrupt Affections, and viscious Habits, ill Prejudices and base Designs, which cloud and darken the Understanding, bribe and pervert the judgment."<sup>3</sup>

In 1751, in his sermon at the Ordination of Jonathan Dorby at Scituate, he declared, "And 'tis pity any man, at his entrance into the ministry, should, in his Ordination vows, get a snare to his soul, by subscribing, or any ways engaging to preach according to another rule of faith, creed or confession, which is merely of human prescription and imposition."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Koch. Republican Religion. P. 187.
  2. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 397.
  3. Ebenezer Gay. The True Spirit of a Gospel-Minister. P. 9.
  4. Quoted by William B. Sprague. Annals of the American Pulpit. Vol. VIII, P. 6.

The second important aspect of Gay's thought was an easily discernible tendency toward Deism. In his Dudleian Lecture delivered at Harvard in 1759,<sup>1</sup> he said: "Religion is divided into natural and revealed: Revealed Religion, is that which God hath made known to Men by the immediate Inspiration of his Spirit, the Declarations of his Mouth, and instructions of his Prophets: Natural, that which bare Reason discovers and dictates."<sup>2</sup> Both kinds of religion are good, both are necessary; they supplement each other. But natural religion alone is heathen; revealed religion alone is incomplete, even "dangerous". At best they are found together and at best they coincide. When they do not, "It must be owing to our Ignorance, or Misapprehension of Things hard to be understood in the Book of Nature, and the Holy Bible, that we cannot reconcile them." But "no doctrine, or Scheme of Religion, should be advanced, or received as scriptural and divine, which is plainly and absolutely inconsistent with the Perfections of God, and the Possibility of Things. Absurdities and Contradictions . . . are not to be obtruded upon our Faith. No Pretense of Revelation can be sufficient for the Admission of them. The manifest Absurdity of Any Doctrine, is a stronger Argument that it is not of God, than any other Evidence can be that it is. . . . To say, in Defense of any religious Tenets, reduced to Absurdity, that the Perfections of God, his Holiness, Justice, Goodness, are quite different Things in Him, from what, in an infinitely lower Degree, they are in Men, is to overthrow all Religion both natural and revealed; and make our Faith, as well as Reason, vain."<sup>3</sup> Gone, here, is Calvin's inscrutability, arbitr-

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1. This lecture series, important as an index of the drift of New England theological thought, will be dealt with later.
  2. "Natural Religion, As Distinguished From Revealed". Dudleian Lecture at Harvard. May 9, 1759. Pub. Boston; 1759. P. 6-7.
  3. Dudleian Lecture. P. 21-23.

ariness. Here is a new reliance upon Reason that Calvin would not have recognized, indeed against which he rebelled. And for all that Gay said that natural and revealed religion supplement each other, he makes the reasonableness, the rationality, of any doctrine, the final test. Gay was no Calvinist. The doctrine of predestination finds no place in his thinking. The emphasis is definitely shifted from the glory of the sovereignty of God, to the dignity and well-being and reason of his creatures.<sup>1</sup>

More important than either of these two men, however, was Jonathan Mayhew, "the father of civil and religious liberty in Massachusetts and America."<sup>2</sup> In his funeral sermon for Jonathan Mayhew in 1766, Charles Chauncey said, "He was eminently a friend to liberty, both civil and religious."<sup>3</sup> For nineteen years (1747-1766) Mayhew was the minister of the West Church in Boston.

As a student at college he had been repulsed by the extravagances of a revival and had chosen, probably under the influence of Dr. Gay, whose student Mayhew was, the cooler way of reason. "A burning fagot," he said, "has no tendency to illuminate the understanding." In revivals "men are converted - only out of their own wits; . . . to attempt to dragoon men into sound orthodox Christians is as unnatural as to attempt to dragoon them into good poets, physicians, or mathematicians."<sup>4</sup>

Settling in the West Church in 1747, he was already known as a heretic,<sup>5</sup> and when the time of his ordination came, only two of the

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1. cf. Koch. Republican Religion. P. 19.

2. This characterization was made by Robert Trent Paine. Quoted in The Pulpit of the American Revolution. John Wingate Thornton.

3. Quoted in William B. Sprague. Annals of the American Pulpit. Vol. VIII, P. 20.

4. Quoted in J. H. Allen. History of the Unitarians. P. 179.

5. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 396.

neighboring ministers responded to the invitation and appeared. A new council had to be convoked, consisting of ministers who were either sympathetic with Mayhew's attitude, or unacquainted with it.<sup>1</sup>

From the outset, he professed the right and duty of private judgment and readily manifested a "spirit of almost haughty independence."<sup>2</sup> For reasons which are not now clear, Mayhew did not become a member of the Boston Association of Ministers and did not take part in the "Thursday Lecture", but instead, established a more attractive series of his own. It is significant that his doctor of divinity degree came to him from <sup>Why?</sup> Aberdeen.<sup>3</sup>

Mayhew corresponded with English Arians and was the ready reader of their books.<sup>4</sup> In line with his belief in the right of private judgment, he opposed the use of creeds as a matter of principle. Without disguise or timidity, he expressed his dissenting views; in 1753 he preached against the Trinity,<sup>5</sup> and two years later, in print, urged the strict unity of God. It is believed this is the first time that a settled New England preacher, openly and avowedly, in speech and in print, espoused what was really the Unitarian point of view.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Koch. Republican Religion. P. 196.

2. J. H. Allen. History of the Unitarians. P. 198.

3. Allen. Ibid. P. 178.

4. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 396. Mayhew's biographer, Allen Bradford (Memoir of Mayhew) makes clear the extent of his reading in this connection. He was under the influence of Clarke on necessity and free will, George Benson on liberty and charity, Samuel Butler on the nature of religious truth, Algernon Sydney and probably Milton and Locke, on the nature and end of civil government. Haroutunian. Piety Versus Moralism. P. 11.

5. "This doctrine he did not scruple even to ridicule, by applying the phrase of the creed to an imaginary deification of the Virgin Mary."

Allen. History of the Unitarians. P. 178.

6. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 396.

In his discussion of the doctrines of God and particularly the work of Christ, it is not easy to be sure that one understands what Mayhew means or where he stands. But there can be no doubt of his clear break with Calvinism.

As a consequence of the Great Awakening, Mayhew revolted not only against its emotional excesses, but also against some of the underlying doctrines of the preaching of the time. In particular he rejected the idea of "irresistible grace", the idea of man's inability to do anything himself to live a Christian life or to aid in his salvation. Mayhew's common sense mind led him to think that decent and moral living was a matter of effort and achievement, and to his moralistic outlook "decent and moral living" were important, the Calvinists to the contrary, notwithstanding.

In a series of sermons,<sup>1</sup> Mayhew year by year made clear his deflection from Calvinism. He had taken exception to the doctrine of inability, and to statements of the doctrine of prevenient grace which led some to "deny there is any sort of connection between the most earnest endeavors of sinners and their obtaining eternal life."<sup>2</sup> If men are to obtain eternal life, they must "strive to enter in at the straight gate" - "the gate of eternal happiness."<sup>3</sup> Those who become aware of "the sense of sin",<sup>4</sup> who "earnestly desire salvation"<sup>5</sup> should strive on to eternal

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1. "Striving To Enter in at the straight Gate explained and inculcated; and the Connection of Salvation therewith proved from the Holy Scriptures". Boston, 1761; and "Men, endowed with Faculties proper to discerning the Difference betwixt Truth and Falsehood" and others in Seven Sermons preached in the West Meeting-House, Boston, in 1748.

2. "Striving to Enter etc." P. 82.

3. Ibid. P. 9.

4. Ibid. P. 11.

5. Ibid. P. 12.

happiness; they should take "Jesus Christ for their guide, and heartily desire to know the truth as it is in him."<sup>1</sup> And those who do strive to follow the example of Jesus are on the right path. Apart from this there are no other requirements for salvation that man must fulfill. Men are fallible creatures, but "God does not expect any more from them than what is within their power."<sup>2</sup>

Mayhew went on to say that more than "striving" was needed; there must be a divine influence, a divine Gift, but the main thesis of Mayhew's sermon and the implications of it could not but be obvious to his readers and hearers.

These sermons of Mayhew occasioned controversy, and Samuel Hopkins, a pupil of Jonathan Edwards, wrote his "Inquiry Concerning the Promises of the Gospel" (1765) in reply to Mayhew's "Striving To Enter in at the Straight Gate . . . and the Connection of Salvation Therewith." The dispute between these two, and ultimately the dispute between Mayhew and all the Calvinists, turned upon the doctrine of total depravity.<sup>3</sup> After Mayhew had expressed the point of view that even the "unregenerate" might have desires and strivings that were pleasing to God, though still unregenerate, and Hopkins had replied that if such strivings were accepted, they were regenerate, and if they were unregenerate, they did not have them, Hopkins was forced to conclude, "All must see, I think, by this time, that in order to understand and settle the question before us, it must be first determined what can be justly predicated of the

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1. "Striving to Enter etc." P. 16.

2. Ibid. P. 17.

3. Foster. Genetic History of New England Theology. P. 134.

doings of unregenerate sinners, and that a just solution of this will put an end to the dispute."<sup>1</sup>

For Hopkins, as for his teacher, Jonathan Edwards, nothing acceptable to God could be "predicated" of the unregenerate. But for the uncalvinistic and moralistic Mayhew, it was almost impossible to distinguish between the regenerate and the unregenerate. To separate men into the saved and the damned had become artificial and absurd to Mayhew. Looking around him Mayhew saw that men were more or less good and more or less bad. They seemed to be capable of both good and evil, and there was no telling which side they would swing to next. If they strove to be good, they were likely to become better; if they did not, it was certain they would become worse. Patently, the wise thing to do was to exhort men to forsake evil, seek the good - "Strive to enter in at the Straight Gate."

Between Mayhew and the Calvinism of Hopkins there was a deep and unbridgeable gulf. When Mayhew wrote, "Men are naturally endowed with faculties proper for distinguishing betwixt truth and error, right and error",<sup>2</sup> he gave some indication of the significance of that gulf. When he wrote, "the doctrine of total ignorance, and incapacity to judge of moral and religious truths, brought upon mankind by the apostacy of our 'First Parents', is without foundation",<sup>3</sup> he was indicating that difference more clearly. And when he wrote "Let us retain a suitable sense of the dignity of our nature in this respect. It is by our reason that we are exalted above the beasts of the field. It is by this, that

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1. Samuel Hopkins. Works. Vol. III, P. 235 F.

2. Mayhew. Seven Sermons. P. 38.

3. Mayhew. Ibid. P. 38.



we are allied to angels, and all the glorious intelligences of the heavenly world: Yea, by this we resemble God himself",<sup>1</sup> it was now made as clear as possible that the gulf between Hopkins and Mayhew was a gulf between two views of human nature. In this study it will be seen that as important as new conceptions of God and Jesus, was a new conception of human nature, as distinguishing the liberal from the Calvinist, and marking the growth of that liberalism. And in Mayhew, particularly in his assumptions about human nature, liberalism had reached its most advanced point short of the Unitarian break.

But another aspect of Mayhew's thinking and preaching reveals not less clearly the completeness of his break with Calvinism; his non-theological humanism. This is first evident in his basic approach to religion. Christianity, he said, was not a scheme of salvation primarily, but "the art of living virtuously and piously".<sup>2</sup> The end of religion was the good life; it was instrumental to the making of decent and happy citizens. Good citizenship required justice, honesty, charity and similar virtues. It was the purpose of religion to encourage, cultivate and accomplish these virtues in the lives of men.

His essentially humanistic and non-theological bent was most clearly revealed in his interest in political issues and in the attitude that he took toward them. Indeed Mayhew is noteworthy not less for his political liberalism and his fervor for the revolutionary cause, than

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1. Mayhew. Seven Sermons. P. 39.

2. Mayhew. "Striving to Enter etc." In a sermon preached in November, of 1755, "A Discourse Occasioned by the Earthquakes" (Boston 1755) it is clear that Mayhew accepted the Newtonian deistic concept of God as "the moral Governor of the universe."

for his theological liberalism. At the beginning of his ministry it was his theological liberalism which marked him. Later, without retreating from an advanced theological position, but losing perceptible interest in theological controversy, his liberalism ran out into political lines, and toward the end of his life it was his political liberalism for which he was so well and widely known. As his biographer says, "Most shocking of all was his repudiation of doctrinal controversy in favor of discussion of political and moral issues."<sup>1</sup> Indeed so far had he ranged from the conventional sources of sermon material and, presumably, so strong had the criticism become, that he felt called upon to defend himself against the charge that it was "out of character for a Christian minister to meddle with such a subject", in the preface to his sermon, "Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-resistance to the Higher Powers", a sermon preached on the anniversary of the execution of Charles I. (January 30, 1749.)

According to one authority, this sermon was "probably the most generally known of the political sermons of the New England clergy in the period preceeding the Revolution."<sup>2</sup> For his text, Mayhew used "Let every soul be subject unto higher powers. For there is no power but of

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1. Alden Bradford. Memoir of the Life and Writings of Rev. Jonathan Mayhew, D. D. P. 234.

2. B. F. Wright, Jr. American Interpretations of Natural Law. P. 48.  
"Mr. Adams (President John Adams) said, 'If the orators on the fourth of July wished to investigate the principles and feelings which produced the American revolution in 1776, they should study the "Rights of the Colonies" by James Otis, and Dr. Mayhew's discourse on "Unsubmission and Non-Resistance." Bradford. Memoir. P. 479.

"This celebrated sermon may be considered as the 'Morning Gun of the Revolution', the punctum temporis when that period of history began." John Wingate Thornton. The Pulpit of the American Revolution: or, the Political Sermons of the Period of 1776.

God: the powers that be are ordained of God." But Mayhew's interpretation of this injunction was that submission was to be accorded to good rulers alone and not to common tyrants and oppressors. He declared in no uncertain fashion that the resistance to the King on the part of Parliament "was not rebellion, but a most righteous and glorious stand, made in defense of the natural and legal rights of the people, against the unnatural and illegal encroachments of arbitrary power." Even God himself does not govern in an absolute, arbitrary manner. He is limited, not to be sure, by the acts of Parliament, but "by the eternal laws of truth, wisdom and equality, and equity, and the everlasting tables of right reason."<sup>1</sup>

More and more frequently Mayhew's thoughts turned to the issues of politics and to the relationship of the colonies to England, and his sermons followed his thoughts. His life ended prematurely, but his influence had been extensive; and to what end his thoughts were moving is indicated by a letter he wrote to James Otis in 1766, the year of his death. "You have heard of the Communion of church. . . . While I was thinking of this in my bed the great use and importance of a communion of colonies appeared to me in a strong light, which led me immediately to set down these hints to transmit to you."

From theological liberalism to political liberalism was a path that more and more of the New England clergy and laity were to walk in this period. Underlying both types of liberalism was a common outlook on life - a high evaluation of human nature and faith in human beings, a trust in and reliance upon reason, a belief in natural religion, and natural law, a belief in progress and in the better and freer life which

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1. Mayhew. "Unsubmission".

could be attained by the use of intelligence and reason and effort. In short, this was the transition from a theological view of life to a humanistic view of life, and Jonathan Mayhew was both an embodiment of this new point of view and a representative of it.

It is more than a coincidence that these three men, Ebenezer Gay, Charles Chauncey, and Jonathan Mayhew, were all graduates of Harvard College, as were other leaders of the liberal movement, as we shall see. When Yale College was founded in 1701, one of the motives in the mind of its founders, was to provide a bulwark for orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup> The fact that doctrines variously denounced as Arminianism, Arianism, Pelagianism, Socinianism and Deism, were openly avowed and championed, as President Quincy says, by "Alumni of Harvard, active friends and advocates of the institution, and in habits of intimacy and professional intercourse with its governors", "gave color for the reports which were assiduously circulated throughout New England, that the influences of the institution were not unfavorable to the extension of such doctrines."<sup>2</sup>

In the nature of the case, anything like the exact theological atmosphere of Harvard, and the extent of its influence, is difficult to establish. But from the nature and frequency of the criticisms of the orthodox group, it is clear that Harvard College and Boston was the center of liberalism in this period.<sup>3</sup> Two factors, however, may be singled out as both causes and expressions of the new spirit.

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1. J. T. Adams. Revolutionary New England. P. 37 and 140.

2. Quincy. The History of Harvard University. Vol. 2, P. 52.

3. In his Memoir of Jonathan Mayhew, Bradford wrote: "It is well known, that about the middle of the last century, (18th) there was a considerable change in the views of many of the clergy...This change...may be justly attributed to the spirit of free and independent inquiry, growing out of the liberal system adopted in the College." P. 23.

One was a gift, in 1719, of books to the Harvard library by Hollis, an liberal English Baptist. Included among these books were those representing the political philosophy of Locke, Milton, Sidney, and Harrington, and the deistic theology of Cudworth, Hutcheson and Clarke.<sup>1</sup> In the case of each of the three men discussed in this chapter, there are references in their writings to these books, and there can be little doubt that the Harvard library was a breeding-place of liberal ideas.

The second factor was the Dudleian lectureship, established in 1755, for "the proving, explaining, and proper use and improvement of the principles of Natural Religion." Riley<sup>2</sup> holds these lectures are of prime importance both as an index of the theological pulse and temper of the Colonies and as a causative factor in the spread of liberal ideas. He emphasizes the widespreadness of deistic thought as a result of these lectures. We feel this is an exaggerated statement, yet both the lectureship itself and the tenor of the lectures are straws in the wind. Liberalism had become articulate as never before. It had captured the enthusiastic allegiance of many of the first minds among the New England clergy.

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1. Schneider. The Puritan Mind. P. 193.

2. Riley. American Philosophy. P. 203.

### Appendix On The Episcopal Church

One other result of the Great Awakening, which we have not mentioned, was the impetus it gave to the Episcopal Church. H. R. Osgood remarks<sup>1</sup> that after the year 1730, the letters of the Anglican missionaries in New England reveal a very definite change in tone. "Before that time the prevailing note was one of discouragement. So few and scattered were they, so meagre their support and so great the obstacles which they confronted that they generally felt the task to be too heavy for them. But such progress was made, such was the increase in the number and ability of the laborers and the strength of the churches founded at so many strategic points . . . that after the date mentioned a tone of confidence becomes perceptible."

Two factors explain this rather sudden increase in popular acceptance of the hitherto despised Episcopal Church. First, the fact that it offered in its public services and in its general ecclesiastical procedure, more dignity and orderliness, and the absence of all "enthusiasm" of revivalism. For it was to those who reacted against the excesses of revivalism, that the Episcopal Church appealed. The second factor was its theological liberalism. In England, the established church was Arminian in its theology, and from the beginning of the 18th century, the missionaries of the Church of England in the New England colonies were carriers of Arminianism.<sup>2</sup> Both of these appeals, generally speaking, attracted the same group.

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1. Osgood. The American Colonies in the 18th Century. Vol. 3, P. 407.

2. Haroutunian. Piety Versus Moralism. P. 220.

What this meant, more specifically, we are able to see in the case of Samuel Johnson. Samuel Johnson has been rescued from oblivion and restored to his rightful place in the history of these times, largely through the efforts of Professor Herbert Schneider of the Philosophy department of Columbia University. Professor Schneider has edited Johnson's "Memoirs" and discussed him at length in his "Puritan Mind". Interestingly enough, Professor Schneider holds a chair of philosophy in the institution which grew out of King's College, of which Johnson was once the head.

Some of the influences to which Johnson (1696-1772) was subject are noted in his "Memoirs". "About this time, 1714, when he was turned 18, came over from England a well chosen library of new books collected by Mr. Dummer, agent for the Colony. He had then all at once the vast pleasure of reading the works of the best English poets, philosophers and divines, Shakespeare and Milton, etc., and Norris, etc., Boyle and Newton, etc., Patrick and Whitby, Barrow, Tillotson, Smith, Scot and Sherlock, etc. All this was like a flood of day to his state of mind."<sup>1</sup> There is something ironical in the fact that Yale, which was founded, in part, because Harvard was not sufficiently orthodox, had some of the heretical books in 1714 which Harvard did not have until five years later.

The effect of this reading upon Johnson was revolutionary. In a notebook which served to guide his teaching at the college as well as his further studies, we have a glimpse of the influence of these English authors. "All this took place in the few years he remained at Yale as tutor. He immediately introduced the new learning into the curriculum,

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1. Samuel Johnson, President of King's College - His Career and Writings.  
ed. Herbert W. Schneider. Vol. 1, P. 6, 7.

and it may have been through him that his pupil, Jonathan Edwards, came into contact with Locke. Johnson even began to talk about natural religion and enjoyed reading the milder Deists, such as Boyle and Wollaston."<sup>1</sup>

Among the group of books mentioned above were many by Anglican divines which impressed Johnson with their scholarly tradition.<sup>2</sup> Then too, these books opened up to him something of the wealth of English poetry and literature of the 17th century. As a result, Johnson "was shocked at the intellectual backwardness of his colony; he was disgusted with the controversial temper and lack of order among the Congregational churches."<sup>3</sup>

So in 1722, Johnson and six friends, one of whom was Timothy Cutler, Rector of Yale College, crossed the Atlantic and took Anglican orders. In England, Johnson discovered the glories of London, the learning of Oxford and the dignity of the Episcopal Church.<sup>4</sup>

This move on the part of Johnson and his friends "shocked Congregationalism throughout New England like an earthquake",<sup>5</sup> but it was a move which was soon duplicated by others.

Now while this took place before the Great Awakening, the reasons for it were the same as those which motivated others after the Great Awakening, and the theological and revivalistic ideas of the Great Awakening were of course already at work at this time. In the "Memoirs" Johnson gave some of the reasons for his entrance into the Episcopal

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1. Schneider. The Puritan Mind. P. 164.

2. Schneider. P. 165.

3. Schneider. P. 165.

4. Schneider. P. 166.

5. Quincy. History of Harvard. P. 364. Vol. 1.



Church, and he mentions first his dislike of the "enthusiasm" which he found in orthodox groups - a fact which he says caused others to take the same step. Furthermore, Calvinism always embarrassed him, he said, and he welcomed the writings of those Deists who made the liberal point of view seem reasonable.

How influential the Episcopal Church might have been as a carrier of liberal ideas and as a refuge for those dissatisfied with the orthodox churches, we have no way of knowing. But that it was not inconsiderable seems clear by the attacks against the church.<sup>1</sup>

However, as the period of the Revolution approached, the Episcopal Church was increasingly under fire.<sup>2</sup> One of Jonathan Mayhew's most widely known sermons was an attack on the Episcopal Church, which he criticized on two points: first, its autocratic form of government, and second, the fact that he saw in it an instrument of political policy.<sup>3</sup>

Since the theological liberals and the political liberals were, for the most part, the same group, the influence of the Episcopal Church dwindled as the 18th century wore on - but from 1700 to 1750, its influence was important.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Quincy. History of Harvard. P. 350-360. Vol. 1.

2. cf. Dunning. P. 267.

3. Prof. W. W. Sweet, in his American Churches, discusses the attack at length.

4. Haroutunian. Piety Versus Moralism. P. 220.

## Chapter V

### The Revolutionary Period

In the Revolutionary Period (1760-1800) there were at least three factors or conditions which had a bearing upon the growth of theological liberalism. They were: (1) the general conditions of the time. (2) The growth of "free-thought". (3) The carrying forward and development of the liberal theological tendencies which we noticed in the last chapter in connection with Gay, Chauncey and Mayhew.

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There is substantial agreement among students of this period of American history,<sup>1</sup> that it was one of unrest, religious laxity, and loosening morality; in short a period characterized by more than the usual change in habits and institutions. The causes for this were many. It was the result, partly, of increased wealth, and wealth, especially when it comes suddenly, has never been known as a strengthener of religious interest and moral sturdiness.<sup>2</sup> Again, it was the result, partly, of increased political uncertainty and unrest; moreover, and this was probably the most important factor, it was the result of the inter-colonial wars of 1755-1765 (and later the Revolutionary War) which increased contact with both French and English mercenaries, who, if we can believe the contemporary reports, were men of the laxest moral codes, and sceptical, if not antagonistic, to religion.

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1. J. F. Jameson. The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement. P. 157, 158.  
R. J. Purcell. Connecticut in Transition (1775-1818). P. 73.  
E. W. Spaulding. New York in the Critical Period (1783-1789). P. 43.  
W. W. Sweet. The Story of the American Churches. P. 200.  
Ezra Stiles. Diary.
  2. J. T. Adams, in his Revolutionary New England, P. 111 ff. and 169 ff., has traced in some detail the results of the increased wealth.

In a letter written in 1759, Ezra Stiles said: "I imagine the American Morals and Religion were never in so much danger as from our Concern with the Europeans in the present War. They put on indeed in their public Conduct the Mark of public virtue - and the Officers endeavor to restrain the vices of the private Soldiery while on Duty. But I take it the Religion of the Army is Infidelity and Gratification of the appetites. . . . They propagate in a genteel and insensible Manner the most corrupting and debauching Principles of Behavior. It is doubted by many Officers if in fact the Soul survives the Body - but if it does, they ridicule the notion of moral accountableness, Rewards and Punishments in another life. . . . I look upon it that our Officers are in danger of being corrupted with vicious principles, and many of them I doubt not will in the End of the War come home minute philosophers initiated in the polite Mysteries and vitiated morals of Deism. And this will have an unhappy Effect on a sudden to spread Deism or at least Skepticism thro' these Colonies. And I make no doubt, instead of the Controversies of Orthodoxy and Heresy, we shall soon be called to the defence of the Gospel itself."<sup>1</sup>

"Stiles was right," says Purcell. "The British regulars from the barracks, where loose morals and looser free thinking prevailed, proved a dangerous associate for the colonial militiamen. The rank and file were familiar with the Anglican Church of the Georges and the officers were frequently imbued with the prevalent continental philosophy or its echoed English rationalism. Their unorthodox thinking impressed men, and their philosophy was assiduously copied as having a foreign style. Thus the militia-man on returning from the campaign introduced his newly acquired habits of thinking and of life among the humble people of his town or

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1. Letter dated September 24, 1759. Quoted in I. Woodbridge Riley. American Philosophy. P. 215.

wayside hamlet. Judging from the reported change in the religious tone of such a town as New Britain, no society was too secluded to escape the baneful contagion. Thus the infidel philosophy of the old world gained a foothold in the new."<sup>1</sup>

Naturally, as the Revolutionary period wore on, this condition increased. Writing of this period, with reference to one county in Connecticut, Ellen D. Larned said: "Her secular affairs were most flourishing, but religion had sadly declined. It was a transition period - a day of upheaval, overturning, uprootal. Infidelity and Universalism had come in with the Revolution and drawn multitudes from the religious faith of their fathers. Free-thinking and free-drinking were alike in vogue. Great looseness of manners and morals had replaced the ancient Puritanic strictness. . . . Now sons of those honored fathers and the great majority of those in active life, were sceptics and scoffers, and men were placed in office who never entered the House of God except for town meetings and secular occasions."<sup>2</sup>

With respect to the colleges, there is abundant evidence which suggests that the same loosening of moral rigor and orthodox religious and theological attitudes which was characteristic of life in general, likewise characterized life within the higher educational institutions.

Ezra Stiles, president of Yale College, records in 1781, some of the subjects for the senior debates: "Whether the immortality of the Soul can be proved by Reason? The Seniors disputed it excellently and

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1. Richard J. Purcell. Connecticut In Transition, 1775-1818. P. 7,8. cf. History of New Britain, Connecticut, 1640-1889. P. 56,57.
  2. Ellen D. Larned. History of Windham County, Connecticut. Vol. II, Pp. 220-221.

learnedly."<sup>1</sup> "Whether the historical parts of the Bible are of divine inspiration?"<sup>2</sup> "Whether virtue (is) founded in Opinion and human Law, or in the eternal Fitness and immutable natural Law?"<sup>3</sup> "Whether any Thing contradictory to Reason is to be found in the Scripture?"<sup>4</sup>

Lyman Beecher, who entered Yale in 1793, two years before Ezra Stiles' presidency (1778-1795) ended, wrote of his experience, that the "college was in a most ungodly state. The college church was almost extinct. Most of the students were skeptical, and rowdies were plenty. Wine and liquors were kept in many rooms; intemperance, profanity, gambling, and licentiousness were common. I hardly know how I escaped. . . . That was the day of the infidelity of the Tom Paine school. Boys that dressed flax in the barn, as I used to, read Tom Paine and believed him; I read, and fought him all the way. Never had any propensity to infidelity. But most of the class before me were infidels, and called each other Voltaire, Rousseau, D'Alembert, etc., etc."<sup>5</sup>

These conditions were not peculiar to Yale. Judge Story, a classmate of Channing, wrote of Harvard in 1794, "College was never in a worse state than when I entered it. Society was passing through a most critical stage. The French Revolution had diseased the imagination and unsettled the understanding of men everywhere. . . . The tone of books and conversation was presumptuous and daring. The tendency of all classes was to scepticism."<sup>6</sup> At Dartmouth College, a college founded in 1769, for the training of religious workers among the Indians, one who had been a member of the college

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1. Ezra Stiles. Literary Diary. Vol. II, P. 512.
  2. Stiles. Ibid. Vol. III, P. 123.
  3. Stiles. Ibid. Vol. III, P. 167.
  4. Stiles. Ibid. Vol. III, P. 267.
  5. Beecher. Autobiography, Correspondence etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.  
Edited by Charles Beecher. Vol. 1, P. 43.
  6. William ~~Henry~~ Channing. Memoir of William Ellery Channing. Vol. I, P. 60.

between 1785 and 1789, recalled that, "The students. . . were many of them very unruly, lawless and without fear of God."<sup>1</sup> And in 1798 the state of religion was so far reduced that but a single member of the class of 1799 was publicly known as a professing Christian.<sup>2</sup> At the College of New Jersey (Princeton) in 1799, "there were only three or four who made any pretensions to piety." And "none except the tutors and three or four students" attended prayer meetings.<sup>3</sup> Bishop Meade of Virginia wrote, "At the end of the century the College of William and Mary was regarded as the hotbed of infidelity and of the wild politics of France."<sup>4</sup>

No contemporary has given a better summary of the conditions which obtained at this time than Timothy Dwight when he said: "The first considerable change in the religious character of the people of this country was accomplished by the war, which began in 1755. War is at least as fatal to morals, as to life, or happiness." "The profanation of the Sabbath, before unusual, profaneness of language, drunkenness, gambling, and lewdness, were exceedingly increased; and, what is less commonly remarked, but is not less mischievous, than any of them, a light, vain method of thinking, concerning sacred things, a cold, contemptuous indifference toward every moral and religious subject. In the mean time, that enormous evil, a depreciating currency gave birth to a new spirit of fraud, and opened numerous temptations, and a boundless field for its operations; while a new and intimate correspondence with corrupted foreigners introduced a multiplicity

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1. Quoted in Frederick Chase. A History of Dartmouth College. Vol. 1, P. 616.
  2. Ibid. Vol. 1, P. 617.
  3. John Johnston. Autobiography. P. 30.
  4. William Meade. Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia. Vol. I, P. 175.

of loose doctrines, which were greedily embraced by licentious men as the means of palliating and justifying their sins."<sup>1</sup>

## II

A second general condition or movement important for our survey of liberalism during the revolutionary period is the growth of free-thought. By "free-thought" is meant religious and theological ideas and concepts which bear a more or less close relationship to deism. (Many writers use the term "deism" to cover the movement with which we are to deal, but in some cases the ideas dealt with are not deistic in the strict sense of the word, and for that reason "free-thought" is used.)

In this discussion it is important to make three distinctions with respect to the representatives of free-thought. In the first place, they represented points of view which were clearly outside the historic Christian philosophy, and are to be classified as deistic or akin to deistic, rather than theistic.

But the representatives of liberalism which we discussed in the last chapter and the ones we shall discuss in this chapter, stood outside the pale of orthodoxy, though they did not stand, at least in their own eyes, outside the Christian movement and tradition. That is to say, their departures from orthodoxy had similarities to other and earlier departures. And, more important still, is the fact that without exception those whom

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1. Timothy Dwight. "A Discourse on Some Events of the Last Century, delivered in the Brick Church in New Haven, on Wednesday, January 7, 1801." P. 18, 19. Leslie Stephen, in his History of English Thought in the 18th Century, remarks upon a similar decay of morality and religious fervor during the latter half of the 18th century, but confesses his inability to explain it. Vol. 1, P. 372. McCosh, in his The Scottish Philosophy, notes a similar condition there.

we label here "liberal", rather than "free-thinking", regarded themselves as spokesmen for a movement which would restore original or pure Christianity. There was no such love of Christianity in its purity, on the part of the free-thinkers.

This leads to another distinction. The representatives of free thought were separated from orthodoxy not only by a theological gulf, but by an emotional gulf as well. In Tom Paine, Ethan Allen, and Elihu Palmer, we have men who were antagonistic not only to the church and theology as they were, but to the idea of the church and to the whole body of Christianity.

Still a third distinction remains to be made between the liberals of the type we have considered and the exponents of free-thought. Chauncey, Gay, and Mayhew represent a revolt of the intellectuals, in the name of the rational approach to theology. They represent the most intellectually gifted and educationally-privileged group in the Colonies. But free-thinking as here considered represents a new phenomenon; the spread of theological dissent of people who had little education and no theological erudition. This is an altogether new phenomenon in American dissent, and it had its rise in the period under consideration.

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I. Woodbridge Riley has drawn attention<sup>1</sup> to the "deistic" strain or tinge which is to be found in New England thought even in the seventeenth century. The opening section of the Boston Platform of 1680, stated that "the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God as to leave men unexcusable."

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1. Riley. American Philosophy.



In Cotton Mather, particularly in his "Christian Philosopher" (London 1721) Riley sees impressive evidence of the emergence of deistic thought.

Whether these incidents are to be interpreted as evidence of deistic influences or are to be regarded as a kind of rationalism which orthodoxy has always used, it is clear that the writings of many eighteenth century New England religious leaders disclose an emphasis upon the purposiveness of nature, the ability of the human mind and reason to fathom nature and nature's God, and a general optimism with respect to nature and to man, which were characteristic of deism in Europe.

But while this attitude and outlook may be noted with increasing frequency up to 1776, it was still an aristocratic cult, confined to a few intellectuals residing in relatively large towns.<sup>1</sup>

After the Revolution two things happened to this deistic movement. It became the possession of the common people, the uneducated people, out in the small towns and rural areas. And it became much bolder and aggressive with respect to the orthodox theology. Whereas deism in its earliest manifestations in New England had meant chiefly an increased reliance upon reason, and later a slight deprecation of revelation, deism now began to vigorously assail the whole concept of the supernatural revelation of Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Characteristic of the militant stage of deism was its anti-church, and anti-clerical bent. When deism reached the point when it suggests not an aristocratic cult but a proletarian mass movement, when its major concern is not so much the advocacy of reason, but an explosive, emotional denunciation of revelation, and "the

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1. H. M. Morais. Deism in 18th Century America. P. 17.

2. Morais. Ibid. P. 120.

superstition of the priesthood and the church," the movement is better characterized as "free-thought" than as deism. Two men who wielded wide influence and who may justly be called leaders of this movement, will give us the temper of free-thought.

Probably not the most important or the most influential of the free-thinkers, but the author of the best known and most widely read single literary production of this group, was Thomas Paine (1737-1809), an native of England who became a naturalized American. His "Age of Reason", published in 1794, marked the high water in the free-thought movement, being carried up by the wave of enthusiasm which his earlier political pamphlets, "Common Sense" and "Rights of Man", had aroused. As the desire to rescue man from the false principles and systems of governments had been the motivation of his earlier political writing, the desire to rescue man from religious fable and the "fiction of book", and bring him to the "right reason God had given him" was the motivation of his "Age of Reason", he avows.<sup>1</sup>

As a young man, Paine came to doubt the validity of the Christian revelation, but was reluctant to publicly develop the destructive implication of his free-thought. In 1776, however, he informed John Adams that he intended to publish a work "against" the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup>

Two factors played a part in turning Paine, when he was almost sixty years of age, away from his resolve of never dishonoring religion nor of ridiculing "any denomination". One was the realization that during the

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1. The Writings of Thomas Paine. Vol. 2, P. 374.

2. Morais. Deism in 18th Century America. P. 20.

French Revolution, most of the higher clergy of the Catholic Church allied themselves with the monarchy and thus were associated with the forces of reaction. As Paine saw the New England clergy play an articulate part in the growing opposition to the French Revolution and as he saw a growing suspicion of France in New England, as part of the natural reaction toward conservatism after the Revolution here, he feared that republican and equalitarian principles were endangered in this country. Paine determined to undermine the position and influence of the clergy - he called it "priesthood" - by putting an end to the source of their authority, the biblical revelation.

In the second place, Paine was genuinely perturbed by the growth of atheism. Paine regarded atheism as the result of the fanatical, superstitious and reactionary tendencies of the clergy. Do away with orthodox Christianity and you end persecution, which in turn would remove the cause of atheism, Paine said in an address in 1797, to the Paris Society of Theophilanthropists, an organization of people who accepted the idea of God, but denied the divine origin and inspiration of the Bible.

Thus, it was to save deism from both the atheist and the orthodox, and republicanism from reactionary priests, that Paine published "The Age of Reason."

The first part of this crudely written, bellicose, unoriginal work - Riley says that with the exception of a phrase or two like "the religion of humanity," there is not an idea in it which cannot be matched in the writings of the English free-thinkers of the Georgian period<sup>1</sup> - is a generalized attack upon revealed religion. Paine argued that it was in the

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1. Riley. American Philosophy. P. 299.

creation, and not in any written or spoken expression, that the word of God was to be found. The Bible was not binding upon future generations, and could not be regarded as a revelation because it was not a direct message from God to man. Its miracle stories were invented by imposters and its prophecies, vague and indefinite, were of no value. To the usual arguments of English deists against miracles and prophecies, Paine adds the charge of priestly manipulation for the purposes of revenue and social control.

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In the second part of the book Paine more specifically attacks the idea of a Christian revelation as found in the Bible. One by one the books of the Old Testament are dismissed as lacking in reason, or inferior in ethical keenness, as in the case of Proverbs, or as fraudulent, as in the case of Isaiah. Denying that Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, and Solomon were the authors of the books bearing their names, he asserted that the first five books of the Old Testament were written by "some very ignorant and stupid pretenders to authorship, several hundred years after the death of Moses."<sup>1</sup>

He denied that Jesus was God; he said the life of Christ was a "fable . . . blasphemously obscene," his ancestry a fiction, his immaculate conception an impossible imposture and his resurrection doubtful."<sup>2</sup> The revealed nature of Christianity Paine repudiated as too "absurd for belief, too impossible to convince, and too inconsistent for practise. . . ." Christianity was "an engine of power", a handmaid of despotism, "a species of atheism" which denied God by introducing the necessity of a Redeemer.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Paine. The Age of Reason. P. 105-120.
  2. Paine. Ibid. P. 194, 196-8, 200.
  3. Paine. Ibid. P. 248-9.

"The Age of Reason" had its more positive side; a presentation of deistic ideas. But those who welcomed it and received it enthusiastically, did so not for its statement of the deistic position, but for its attack on orthodox Christianity and the clergy.

The book was attacked in countless sermons and public addresses, its author called "a filthy little atheist" and roundly condemned and vilified.<sup>1</sup> But if anything, these attacks resulted in a wider circulation of the book. It sold for a few pence or was given away by some of the numerous free-thinking clubs. Within two decades it was found on the banks of the Genesee and Ohio; within two more it circulated freely along the frontiers of Tennessee and Kentucky. The president of Transylvania University was suspected of promulgating its ideas, and a friend of Abraham Lincoln reported that in Indiana, "The 'Age of Reason' passed from hand to hand, furnishing food for the evening's discussion in tavern and village store."<sup>2</sup>

Younger than Paine, and writing his great work, "Reason the Only Oracle of Man", a decade before "The Age of Reason" was published, was Ethan Allen, popular revolutionary leader, hero and captor of Ticonderoga. Like Paine, Allen was accorded a literary reception based more upon his popular fame in military and revolutionary areas, than upon the intrinsic merit of his work.

Born in 1737, in Litchfield, Connecticut, Allen lived most of his life in the remoter parts of Connecticut, and the mountains of Vermont. While preparing for college, which he never entered because of the death

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1. J. Adams. Works. Ed. by C. F. Adams. Vol. IX, P. 627.  
2. Riley. American Thought. P. 89.

of his father, he fell under the influence of a free-thinking English physician, Thomas Young. It is believed that Allen and Young agreed to write a book together attacking Christianity. Later they agreed that the one who outlived the other was to publish the book, using the other's notes and ideas.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the influence of Thomas Young, account must be taken of the "Armenian" - as it was commonly called - influence which grew as a reaction to the Great Awakening, and later, the influence which resulted from the alliance with France. In 1779, Allen wrote: "My affections are Frenchified", and in his "Narrative of Col. Ethan Allen's Captivity" there is a glowing appreciation of all things French.<sup>2</sup>

The roughness of his manners and coarseness of his speech are readily seen in his "Reason the Only Oracle." Allen recognized its literary limitations. The fact that it was a collection of things he had written over a period of years - in the preface he relates that he early formed the habit of scribbling down ideas which came to him - explains, in part, the 'roughness' of the work, and gives substance to the suggestion (cf. above and footnote on two biographies) that he worked not only from his own notes, but from those left by Thomas Young as well.

Allen wrote with all the aggressiveness of Paine, and with a liveliness and homely wit that Paine lacked. Through it runs a certain intellectual pretentiousness that suggests at once, an uncomfortable realization of how much the early death of his father, which prevented his attendance at college, had robbed him, and a determination, born of

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1. Two biographers of Allen convey this idea: Henry Hall in his Ethan Allen, the Robin Hood of Vermont, P. 21; and John Pell, Ethan Allen, P. 16.
  2. Allen. Narrative of Col. Ethan Allen's Captivity. P. 116-117.

his frontier experience, to show himself a 'self-made' man.

"Reason the Only Oracle of Man, or a Compenduous System of Natural Religion, Alternately adorned with Confutations of a variety of Doctrines incompatible to it; Deduced from the most exalted Ideas which we are able to form of the Divine and Human characters, and from the Universe in General" has been called "the first formal publication in the United States openly directed against the Christian religion."<sup>1</sup> Whether or not it was the first, it certainly was one of the most vicious and unrestrained. There are satirical gibes at the Old Testament, due in part, in all probability, to the childish and literal interpretation of the Bible which was so common in the frontier life of his boyhood. Irreverently, he deals with Moses, drawing special attention to the fact that he was "the only historian in the circle of my reading, who has ever given the public a particular account of his own death."<sup>2</sup>

With fine insight, however, he senses in many of the stories of Moses, the "priestly hand", though he interprets these influences not in the sense that modern biblical scholarship does, but in terms of a degenerate group of men who would exploit the common man.

With respect to the moral codes of the Old Testament, Allen was less antagonistic and even admiring and appreciative at times. However, insofar as these moral codes are true, they are the result of man's realization of "the law of nature" and as such "were previously known to every nation under heaven, and in all probability by them as much practised as by the tribes of Israel."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Timothy Dwight. Travels in New England and New York. Vol. 2, P. 406.
  2. Allen. Reason the Only Oracle of Man. P. 301-302.
  3. Allen. Ibid. P. 191.

Allen came out about where Paine was to come out: the Bible is neither infallible nor a miraculous revelation of the will of God. Nor was it to be regarded as regulative or normative for human reason.<sup>1</sup> But Allen, moderating his tone, does not wish to be too severe a critic, for "it must be acknowledged, that those ancient writers laboured under great difficulties in writing to posterity merely from the consideration of the infant state of learning and knowledge, then in the world, and consequently we should not act the part of severe critics with their writings, any further than to prevent their obtrusion on the world as being infallible."<sup>2</sup>

Allen rejected the anthropology and the scheme of salvation of orthodoxy as completely as he rejected its idea of revelation. "We cannot be miserable for the sin of Adam, or happy in the righteousness of Christ, in which transactions we were no ways accessory or assisting as accomplices, or otherwise concerned; and are not at all conscious of those matters. . . . What have those old and obsolete matters to do with our virtues or vices, or with our consciousness of righteousness or wickedness, happiness or misery, reward or blame?"<sup>3</sup> We are neither damned by Adam's sin or saved by Jesus' blood, but "must finally adopt the old proverb, viz. every tub stands upon its own bottom."<sup>4</sup>

Of the atonement he says, "there could be no justice or goodness in one being's suffering for another, nor is it at all compatible with reason to suppose, that God was the contriver of such a propitiation."<sup>4</sup> "The doctrine of the incarnation itself, and the virgin mother, does not

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1. Allen. Reason the Only Oracle of Man. P. 440.  
2. Ibid. P. 42.  
3. Ibid. P. 397-398.  
4. Ibid. P. 390.



merit a serious confutation and therefore is passed by in silence, except the mere mention of it."<sup>1</sup> "The doctrine of the Trinity is destitute of foundation, and tends manifestly to superstition and idolatry."<sup>2</sup> "That Jesus Christ was not God is evident from his own words",<sup>3</sup> besides being contradictory "for God and man are not and cannot be one and the same."<sup>4</sup>

Allen's "Reason the Only Oracle of Man" had its positive side in addition to its attack on orthodoxy, but the positive presentation of his own system is considerably less lively than his attempted destruction of Calvinism. There is a long, abstract defense of reason, an equally long and even more abstract description of God as "harmony". Arguing against both the orthodox belief in "magical interference" which would make nature a "supernatural whirligig" and "an inconstant and erring mechanism", and against the Calvinistic predestination, Allen was led into a number of incongruities from which he never extricated himself. Equally verbose and less enlightening is his description of the origin of the world, which he would place over against the Mosaic account of creation. Safe it is to say, that those who eagerly read Allen's chief work, read it not for his constructive argument, but for his attack on the orthodoxy of the day, of which Allen's picture is not always a fair or accurate one.

Of the influence of this book it is difficult to accurately judge. Undoubtedly the author's fame as a military hero, and his popularity in Vermont added greatly to its appeal. On the other hand, its circulation was curtailed by the fact that a large proportion of the first

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1. Allen. op. cit., P. 356.
  2. Ibid. P. 352.
  3. Ibid. P. 352.
  4. Ibid. P. 352, 418.

copies were destroyed by a fire in the printing establishment. But the number and geographical spread of the attacks made upon it, as well as the requests for copies that came from distant admirers,<sup>1</sup> are reliable indications that it had many readers.

What the latest biographer of Allen said of him might be said of Thomas Paine as well, and indeed, of a group of which these two men are merely outstanding representatives: "His abandonment of accepted dogma, belongs in the same category as his abandonment of the crown."<sup>2</sup> "Paine's doctrine may be given in two words. Kings, like priests, are cheats and imposters. The dawn of the "Age of Reason" implies the disappearance of royalty from politics as of superstition from religion. Democracy corresponds in one sphere to Deism in the other."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in the emotional quality, the anger, the boisterousness, of the attack of Paine and Allen upon orthodox Calvinism, there is a clear indication of a depth of dissent which can only be interpreted as a fundamental shift in basic religious and theological assumptions and attitudes.

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1. cf. John Pell. Ethan Allen. P. 253.

2. Pell. Ibid. P. 76.

3. Leslie Stephens. History of English Thought in the 18th Century. V.II,P.262.

Note - Two other men, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, might conceivably be discussed in connection with free-thought, though neither of them display the emotional antagonism to Christianity or the anti-clerical, anti-church qualities of Paine, Allen and Palmer. These men had great influence, but their fame and influence were achieved in other spheres and both of them avoided doctrinal controversy. Both were attacked as enemies of religion and as atheists, and it was in answer to such a charge that Jefferson gave a clear statement of his position in a letter to a friend. "My views are the results of a life of inquiry and reflection, and very different from the anti-Christian opinions imputed to me by those who know nothing of my opinions. To the corruptions of Christianity, I am, indeed opposed; but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus himself. I am a Christian, in the only sense in which he wished any one to be sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every human excellence; and believing he never claimed any other." Letter to Dr. Rush, quoted in American Philosophy, by Riley, P. 269. If the scope of this study were not limited to New England, these two men would have been given greater consideration.

We have now to trace the more definitely and precisely theological aspects of the liberal movement during this revolutionary period of 1760 to 1800.

The political uncertainty and unrest of this period, the political debate and discussion which preceded the Revolutionary War, above all, the actual war itself, the uncertainty and discussion which followed the war with respect to the future form of government in the Colonies - all these worked against full consideration of the theological issues of the day, and at the same time cast up questions which must have seemed, at times, more important than the points of theological controversy.

Nevertheless, while the time was not propitious for carrying on in print the sort of battle in which Bellamy and Mayhew had engaged in the previous period, the liberal movement within the churches continued to spread and grow, perhaps more widely and faster than at any other period.

Two men are outstanding at this period who are representative leaders, and must be considered for a proper understanding of the progress of the liberal movement in this period.

James Freeman, a graduate of Harvard in the class of 1777, was invited in 1782 to become reader in Kings Chapel, in Boston. Organized in 1686, Kings Chapel was the oldest Episcopal Church in New England. During the Revolution the chapter had severed its connection with the Church of England and therefore had been unable to secure a properly ordained Episcopal clergyman. Freeman, as reader, was to conduct the service and to preach when inclined.

Freeman had been influenced by the views of Samuel Clarke, and had scruples about repeating the Athanasian Creed. Upon his request, per-

mission was granted him to omit it from the service. It was not long, however, before Freeman began to feel uneasy about other parts of the liturgy, especially references to the Trinity. He reported his difficulties to the people and offered to resign. They asked him rather to preach a series of sermons on the subject. Freeman did so, with the result that most of the people accepted his views.

Soon there came to Boston, an English Unitarian minister, William Hazlitt (father of the essayist). Hazlitt showed Freeman a copy of a revised Prayer Book adopted for use in Lindsey's Unitarian Church in London, in 1774. In 1712, Samuel Clarke<sup>had</sup> published "The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity", in which he brought together every text in the New Testament bearing upon the subject. From these he drew the conclusion that the Scripture doctrine is that the Father alone is the supreme God to whom supreme worship may be paid, and that Jesus is subordinate to Him. In this book Clarke intimated that the Prayer Book ought to be revised to conform to this understanding. Later he drew up a scheme of revision of the Prayer Book which Lindsey used.

Freeman proposed to the proprietors of the Chapel that the Prayer Book used by Lindsey's group in London be adopted for use in King's Chapel. The proprietors accepted this proposal on June 19, 1785. All references to the Trinity, and all <sup>prayers</sup> ~~powers~~ to Christ were thus eliminated. In 1811, the Apostles Creed was dropped. The first Episcopal Church in America became the first Unitarian Church, not in name but in practise.

After this action Freeman decided to seek ordination, and though both he and the church had renounced Episcopal affiliation, he sought ordination at the hands of the Bishop of Connecticut. The matter was presented

to the Episcopal clergy in 1786, and Freeman was examined. In a letter to his father, he wrote: "Upon the whole, finding me an incorrigible heretic, they dismissed me without granting my request."<sup>1</sup>

At this turn, Freeman fell back upon a suggestion William Hazlitt made the day he arrived in Boston, at a meeting of the Boston Association of Ministers in the home of Charles Chauncey. The conversation happened to turn upon ordination, and Hazlitt stated as his opinion "that the people or the congregation who chose any man to be their minister were his proper ordainers." So in November of 1787, Freeman was ordained by the church itself.<sup>2</sup>

A close friendship grew up between Hazlitt and Freeman, and Hazlitt published several letters in support of Freeman, both with respect to the changes in the liturgy and to Freeman's ordination. At the suggestion of Freeman, Hazlitt published a "Scriptural Confutation of the Thirty-Nine Articles", which helped convert King's Chapel to Unitarianism. Freeman stated that "this could never have been done without Hazlitt's help,"<sup>3</sup> but Freeman had said in a letter to his father, December 24, 1782, "the proprietors of the Chapel are very liberal in their notions. They allow me to make several alterations in the service, which liberty I frequently use."<sup>4</sup> And we know that when the American Episcopal Church came to organize after the Revolution, it was at first proposed to thoroughly revise the Prayer Book, omitting among other things both the Nicene and the Athanasian Creeds.<sup>5</sup> A further indication of the theological temper of

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1. Quoted in William B. Sprague. Annals of the American Pulpit. Vol VIII,
  2. Sprague. Annals. Vol. VIII, P. 168 P. 167.
  3. Quoted from Monthly Repository, Vol. III, P. 305, in George W. Cooke. Unitarianism in America.
  4. Sprague. Annals. Vol. VIII, P. 164.
  5. Wilbur. P. 398-399.

the people among whom Freeman worked is contained in a letter to Mr. Lindsey in England: "I mentioned in a former letter, that Bishop Seabury had ordained a priest in Boston. The members of my congregation in general attended. They were so shocked with the service, particularly with that part where the bishop pretends to communicate the Holy Ghost and the power of forgiving sins which he accompanied with the action of breathing on the Candidate, that they now congratulate me upon having escaped what they consider a little short of blasphemy."<sup>1</sup>

Freeman cannot be regarded as one of the most intellectual leaders of the liberal movement - he had neither the intellectual strength nor the controversial spirit of Mayhew. Perhaps, lacking the latter quality, he was the better able to take some of the main tenets of the liberal gospel and put them into practise, as it were. Indeed it is as a popularizer, rather than the originator, of the newer ideas that he is noted. He was an attractive, effective and practical preacher;<sup>2</sup> he never claimed credit for the movement or for outstanding leadership, "but referred to Dr. Mayhew and others as having preached the same doctrine before."<sup>3</sup> And while he freely admitted his indebtedness to Hazlitt, it is clear that Freeman was not so extreme as Hazlitt or Priestly. In fact, Freeman was not a Unitarian in the modern sense; Christ did not belong to the Godhead, but he was not simply a man.<sup>4</sup>

More important for the intellectual and theological strength of the liberal gospel, if not for its entrance into the actual life of the

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1. Extract from the "Panoplist". Review of American Unitarianism, by Jedidiah Morse. I found this in the Sprague Collection in Princeton.
  2. Foster. Genetic History of New England Theology. P. 277.
  3. Sprague. Annals of the American Pulpit. Vol. VIII, P. 169.
  4. James Freeman. Sermons on Particular Occasions. P. 65, 67, 285.

church, was William Bentley, who was minister of the East Church in Salem from 1783 until his death in 1819. Bentley was a classmate of Freeman's at Harvard. Three years after his graduation in 1787, he returned as tutor in Mathematics, a position he held until 1783, when he began his ministry at Salem.

In Salem, Bentley did not find himself a lone voice upholding liberalism. In the First Church was the Rev. John Prince, like Priestly, the English Unitarian whom he greatly admired, much given to scientific experiments, reading and circulating English Unitarian books. In the North Church was Dr. Thomas Barnard, less outspoken in his pulpit, but not much less interested in advanced theological ideas. Of him it is said that when one of his parishioners remarked, "Dr. Barnard, I never heard you preach a sermon on the Trinity", he promptly replied, "No, and you never will."<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning Bentley was more outspoken than either of his colleagues. His sympathy for Priestly and the cause of English Unitarianism was well known. Like Freeman, Bentley was influenced by the sojourn of Hazlitt in New England, and Bentley soon adopted Priestly's Catechism as a substitute for the Westminster Catechism;<sup>2</sup> and the church in Salem was only a little behind King's Chapel in becoming openly Unitarian. In January, 1791, Bentley wrote that he had examined the first chapter of the Gospel of John, and after duly considering the Athanasian, Arian and Unitarian hypotheses, he had accepted the Unitarian position. A week later, preaching on the text, "The Church of God which he had pur-

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1. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 400.

2. William Bentley. Diary. Vol. I, P. XV.

chased with his own blood", he gave a summary of the arguments for the position that Jesus was not God.<sup>1</sup> In this respect Bentley was much more militantly anti-Trinitarian and much more controversial in his preaching and whole bearing. He was brusquely independent, in action as in thought. As he discarded the creed of orthodoxy, he discarded the great wig, "which was its symbol", and early in his ministry he discontinued the Friday "preparatory lecture" then customary before Communion Sunday.<sup>2</sup>

Bentley was noted for his learning. He was said to be "expert in at least twenty-one languages and their literature" and so adept in calligraphy that manuscript copies made by him, in Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic, are models of that art. He refused invitations to become the president of the University of Virginia and of a small college in Vermont.

As in the case of Freeman, the outspoken liberalism of Bentley is to be appreciated only in the light of the temper of the people among whom he worked and lived. Salem was the center of foreign trade and overseas commerce, and the majority of its families were either ship-owners or connected with trading. "In 1790, the two hundred and twenty-eight heads of families in Dr. Bentley's East church, included thirty-five mariners, fifty-eight master mariners, nine boat- or ship-builders, five rope- or sail-makers, and five fishermen. Even people whose principal occupation was independent of commerce, generally owned a share in a ship, or made private adventures. . . . Unquestioned social preeminence was enjoyed by the merchant-shipowner."<sup>3</sup> And twenty out of Salem's twenty-four

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1. Samuel A. Eliot. Heralds of a Liberal Faith. Vol. 1, P. 151.

2. Allen. A History of the Unitarians. P. 182.

3. Morison. The Maritime History of Massachusetts (1783-1860) P. 122,123.



most prominent families, all engaged in foreign trade, were Unitarians.<sup>1</sup>

The atmosphere created by this condition was conducive to the breaking down of small prejudice and creating a spirit of cosmopolitanism, tolerance and sympathy for alien ways of living and thinking. Historians are quick to point to the importance of this factor in creating an atmosphere congenial to the outlook of men like Bentley. Thus, "the first liberalizing influence upon the old Puritan theology was felt in that community through its navigators, even more than through its critics and theologians. As soon as they came into those warmer latitudes, their crust of prejudice melted and cracked from them like films of ice; and in place of the narrow tradition they carried out with them they brought home the germs of a broad religion of humanity."<sup>2</sup>

Bentley flatly rejected the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity and held a high conception of the worth of human nature. In 1792 he wrote: "I took the liberty in the most exceptional manner to deliver my sentiments against total depravity as preached at a late lecture."<sup>3</sup> For the Calvinist concept of salvation he substituted a moralistic one: "Heaven and happiness were not designed by God as the exclusive rights of learned priests, or ingenious doctors; they are the end which God has proposed for all mankind, and are therefore, by the same means, attainable by all men. Riches and honors cannot ensure the purchase; neither can learning, pompous titles, respect nor dignity. Virtue alone is the moral happiness of the world, and personal virtue alone secures heaven."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Allen. History of the Unitarians. P. 183-184.

2. Allen. Ibid. P. 184-5. See also Cooke. Unitarianism in America. P. 80 and "Old Salem Sea-Captains" in Thomas W. Higginson's Travellers and Outlaws, and Joseph B. Felt's Annals of Salem, Vol. VII, P. 70, 285, etc.

3. Eliot. Heralds of a Liberal Faith. Vol. I, P. 151.

4. "A Sermon, preached at the Stone Chapel (King's Chapel) in Boston, September 12, 1790". P. 8-9.

This same moralistic approach which honored virtue wherever it was found, Bentley lauded in one of his parishioners. "He never thought men, who differed from him, were fools or knaves. He had a persuasion that religious opinions depend not on names, but upon sincere inquiry, for their best influence, and that an honest mind might be so circumscribed, as to admit the most absurd doctrines, and be uncharitable in the defence of them, while there might be great benevolence in the native purposes of the heart. He therefore loved all men, who acted in sincerity, and never found his own heart less sensible, nor his hand less ready, from the opinions, conditions, or prejudices of any men." "He loved men, rather than opinions, (He professed the Unitarian doctrine.) and he desired to know more of their actions, than of their professions."<sup>1</sup>

In this emphasis upon morality and virtue rather than theological dogma, Bentley was nearer the deists than the Calvinists. Indeed in his most famous sermon, "A Sermon, preached at the Stone Chapel in Boston", there are all the elements of deism. There is the emphasis upon Natural Religion; "Natural religion is still the most excellent religion".<sup>2</sup> By natural religion the will of God is made known to us - Christianity only assists us in the further knowledge and practise of it. Revelation acts merely in an auxiliary capacity until "a variety of causes, wisely fitted to act, render this assistance unnecessary."<sup>3</sup>

There is the deprecation of dogma, the reducing of religion to morality: "However numerous our doctrines, whether simple or mysterious;

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1. "A Funeral Discourse, delivered in the East Meetinghouse, Salem, on the Sunday after the Death of Major General John Fiske, who died September 28, 1797". P. 16, 24.
  2. "A Sermon, preached at the Stone Chapel in Boston." P. 17.
  3. Ibid. P. 18.

whether we receive all the dogmas of the church or not, let us consider that we should produce good fruits. . . . When a man is found, who does not profess much, nor despise all, who is pure from guile, peaceable in his life, gentle in his manners, easily dissuaded from revenge, with an heart to pity and relieve the miserable, impartial in his judgment, and without dissimulation, this is the man of religion."<sup>1</sup>

There is the emphasis upon the goodness of human nature, the acceptableness of its sincere efforts, and the universality of natural religion: "How much more pure the charity of a savage, than the pulpit-anathemas of a priest against churches which differ from his own."<sup>2</sup>

"God was the friend of Israel that He might advance through them a universal religion. Although the Mohammedans like the Jew err in detail, we must be convinced that his devotion, zeal, and obedience are acceptable to God, the universal parent of all. Religion in this larger view leads us to consider ourselves not small societies only, . . . but as belonging to the household of the faithful, who dwell in every nation, and in every clime, with one God and Father, who hateth nothing that he has made, but loveth and cherisheth it."<sup>3</sup>

And finally, in that slight touch of opposition to the "priestly" and "ecclesiastical" which is contained in his remark, "a bold stroke at the pride of priestcraft and a just assertion of the right of every religious association",<sup>4</sup> made at the time Freeman was ordained congregationally, a sympathetic connection with the anti-clerical free-thinkers like Paine, Palmer and Allen, is indicated.

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1. Bentley. "A Sermon, etc." P. 19-21.
  2. Ibid. P. 15.
  3. Ibid. P. 22-23.
  4. Bentley. Diary. Vol. III, P. 405-406.

One other aspect of the life and activity of Bentley must be given brief mention here - his admiration for and connection with Thomas Jefferson, and his espousal of Paine and Palmer and their writings. He was an ardent supporter of the Republican cause and warm admirer of Jefferson, for which he incurred the dislike of the conservatives. On September 20, 1805, he wrote: "I am informed that my friendship for Mr. Jefferson will submit me to great evils".<sup>1</sup> And a few days later, "the abuse which I receive, when called by name in the Federal papers, obliges me to take great satisfaction in the able vindication of the man I esteem as the greatest national benefactor."<sup>2</sup>

The Federalists linked his name with that of Thomas Paine, and not without reason. He had paid for a copy of one of Paine's works for each member of his singing school. However, he was aware of the limitations of both Paine's personality and his writings.

Bentley had long been sympathetic with, or at least tolerant of, the deists,<sup>3</sup> and was familiar with their writings. He lent his own copies to friends, with unfortunate consequences for his own reputation.<sup>4</sup> How far Bentley had come from the orthodoxy and how sympathetic he was with its most vituperative opponents may be seen in the entry in his diary upon hearing of the death of Allen, when he spoke of him as "the noted Col. Ethan Allen, who distinguished himself in the last war in Canada and since by the book in his name, called "The Oracles of Reason."<sup>5</sup> Over against this reference we may place the reference to the same event made by Ezra

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1. Bentley. Diary. Vol. III, P. 192.
  2. Ibid. Vol. III, P. 193.
  3. Koch. Republican Religion. P. 218.
  4. Ibid. P. 218.
  5. Bentley. Diary. Vol. I, P. 120.

Stiles, once the president of Yale, who previously had defended the presence of deistic books in the Yale library: "13th inst. died in Vermont the profane and impious Deist Gen. Ethan Allen, Author of the "Oracles of Reason", a Book replete with scurrilous Reflections on Revelation. 'And in Hell he lift up his Eyes being in Torments.'"<sup>1</sup>

By the militancy as well as the completeness of his dissent, his fervor in the revolutionary political cause and his close sympathy with the leaders, his connection with some of the representatives of the destructive phase of deism and free-thought, Bentley occupies a unique place in the movement of the liberal theology away from Calvinism and into Unitarianism. He was the last liberal within the traditional churches. Only one step remained - a big one - the definite break with the Trinitarian churches and the emergence of Unitarian churches.

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1. Ezra Stiles. Diary. Vol. III, P. 345.

## Chapter VI

### The Emergence of Unitarianism

The Hollis Professorship of Divinity in Harvard College fell vacant in 1803, upon the death of the Rev. Dr. David Tappan. This professorship had been endowed in 1721, by Thomas Hollis, an English Baptist, whose intimate friends and advisors were on the liberal side of the Salters' Hall controversy.<sup>1</sup> It was the chief position of theological influence in New England, and a sharp controversy between the liberal and orthodox parties brought out for the future control of the chair.<sup>2</sup>

The corporation in whose power the appointment of a successor to Tappan lay, was equally divided between the liberals and the orthodox, and no appointment was made for two years. In 1805, the liberals obtained a majority and the corporation appointed Henry Ware. It was generally understood, and it soon became apparent, that Ware was a Unitarian. The opposition, which had been led by Dr. Jedidiah Morse, for fifteen years the sole public defender of the doctrine of the Trinity in the vicinity of Boston,<sup>3</sup> withdrew support from Harvard and founded a theological seminary in Phillips Academy at Andover in 1808.

The struggle for control of the Hollis Professorship of Divinity at Harvard is generally regarded as the opening battle in the controversy which led to the formation of the American Unitarian Association in 1825. In this first encounter the liberals had won, a fact soon emphasized by

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1. In 1719, an assembly composed of Baptists, Independents and Presbyterians met in Salters' Hall, London, to deal with a problem created by the Arian and Unitarian tendencies in these groups. Though the issues at Salters' Hall were doctrinal in foundation, the whole issue of religious freedom - subscription or non-subscription - was involved. Cf. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 336 ff.

2. Foster. A Genetic History of New England Theology. P. 279.

3. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 407.

the appointment of a liberal president of the institution and several liberal professors.

Before going on to consider the successive steps in this controversy, it will be well to sketchily deal with some of the events in the political world which provided a background for the theological contest.

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The war with England ended in 1783. During the war there had been little unity, either of informal desire and purpose, or of a formal political and constitutional nature.<sup>1</sup> After the war, a period of unrest, political, economic and social confusion and indirection set in which lasted to at least 1800, in its worst aspects.

On June 21, 1788, the ninth state ratified the Constitution, and some of the uncertainty began to be dissipated. But there had been, in the preparation of the Constitution and concerning its actual provisions, such dissent and disagreement, which gave rise to political divisions and parties, that the disunity was as great as ever. The cleavages between these parties had repercussions for the religious and theological situation.

One group, known as the Federalists, was headed by Alexander Hamilton. This group sought a strong, centralized government endowed with power to reestablish public credit, even if this meant some injustice, and to protect the property and interests of the rich and well-to-do. They desired closer relations with England than with France, and looked with some evident satisfaction upon the monarchical and aristocratic

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1. cf. Charles A. and Mary R. Beard. The Rise of American Civilization. 1930 edition. Vol. 1, P. 290. Also James Truslow Adams. Revolutionary New England. P. 450.

influence of England, while distrusting the mass of common citizens. They lived in a real fear that the revolutionary principles might be carried too far. Geographically and socially the Federalists represented New England, New York, Pennsylvania, the larger cities, and the established middle and upper classes.

The opposing group, the Republicans, found their leader in Thomas Jefferson. Geographically and socially, the Republicans were found in the southern states, in the small communities, and in the agricultural sections. They were agrarian and non-commercial. Here a more thoroughly revolutionary and democratic ideal operated. Here were the friends of France. Here was the fear of the potential tyranny of a strong, centralized government.<sup>1</sup>

The passions aroused by the domestic issues between these two parties were the more inflamed by dramatic events in the sphere of foreign affairs. "A terrible political storm - the French Revolution and the wars let loose by it - was in progress in Europe, leveling kings, princes, aristocracies, and clerical orders, remaking the map of the Old World, and shaking the foundations of all its social systems."<sup>2</sup>

Nearly all American patriots at first rejoiced in what seemed to be an application in France of the doctrines they had so recently espoused here. Thomas Paine declared that "the principles of America opened the Bastille", and it is certain that the French officers and soldiers,

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1. "Slogans" are always dangerous over-simplifications, but the tempers of the two parties might, with a fair degree of accuracy, be epitomized in well-known statements of the leaders: "The people are sure to go right if you leave them alone"; "...the essential rectitude of purpose of the people." (Thomas Jefferson) "Your people, sir, is a great beast." (Alexander Hamilton)

2. Beard. The Rise of American Civilization. P. 358.



after serving in Washington's army, had borne home with them stories of the American experiment that awakened a spirit of emulation.

"It was not without reason, therefore, that the citizens of the United States viewed with pride the first stage of the French Revolution as reflecting in some measure their own political wisdom and progressive ideas. 'In no part of the globe,' wrote John Marshall, 'was this revolution hailed with more joy than in America.' Those who had misgivings concealed them. 'Liberty,' exclaimed an overwrought Boston editor, in 1789, 'will have another feather in her cap. . . The ensuing winter will be the commencement of a Golden Age.' Washington, to whom LaFayette sent the key of the ruined Bastille, accepted it as a 'token of the victory gained by liberty.'<sup>1</sup>

Soon, however, rumors began to reach the United States that the revolution was turning into ominous civil strife. As the rumors became definite, substantiated facts, a shift in feeling took place. The Federalists and conservatives took fright as indeed the forces of conservatism did in every country. Thomas Paine took up his pen in defense of the French Revolution and to attack Burke for his denunciation of it in England. But Paine's defense of the Revolution, far from calming the American conservatives, only increased their fears.

The Republicans or Anti-Federalists organized swiftly a network of democratic societies from one end of the United States to the other, using for their model the French political clubs. Extremists among them demanded the completion of the leveling process in the United States in accordance with French practices and doctrines. Titles, such as Sir, His

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1. Beard. The Rise of American Civilization. P. 360.

Excellency, were decried as too aristocratic, and it became fashionable to speak of Citizen Jones, Citizeness Smith. In the same spirit, democrats in Boston advocated the renaming of Royal Exchange Alley, Equality Lane; in New York, King Street was rechristened Liberty Street.<sup>1</sup>

The conservative Federalists, already deeply moved by the domestic agitation of the Republicans, turned upon them as defenders of the French Revolution and members of the democratic societies, and the term "Jacobin" was applied heatedly, to all those who evinced any sympathy for France. Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson bore the brunt of the attack, and in pulpit and press they were denounced as enemies of the government, of religion, and of civilization itself.<sup>2</sup>

Two factors must be kept in mind at this point: first, one of the strongholds of "Federalism" was New England; second, the attack on France was not limited to the excesses of the French Revolution and the political ideals of the leaders of the Revolution. A deep suspicion of and antipathy to, everything French, set in.

This was extremely important for the religious situation. It meant the sharp curtailment of the influence of Paine and Ethan Allen in New England. The free-thinking societies inaugurated by Elihu Palmer<sup>3</sup> took no deep rootage in New England. The few free-thinking societies

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1. This section is based upon Beard. The Rise of American Civilization. Pp. 358-378.

2. Beard. Ibid. P. 366.

3. Elihu Palmer, born 1764, in Connecticut, belongs, with Paine and Ethan Allen, to the leaders of the anti-clerical, militant deistic or free-thinking group. Palmer's importance, however, attached not to his capacity as a thinker or writer, but to his practical leadership and organizing ability. Because his thinking was comparatively unimportant and, in any case, was substantially the same as that of Paine and Allen, no particular attention has been paid to him here.

that continued had an ineffective influence, whereas in the larger cities to the south and in the dominantly agrarian and frontier areas, which were also places of Anti-Federalist or Republican sympathy, they continued for years.

In New England, two religious leaders, Jedidiah Morse and Timothy Dwight, were conspicuous for the aggressiveness of their attack on the infidelity - political and religious - which stemmed from France. In his fast-day sermon, May 9, 1798, Morse, minister of the Congregational Church of Charlestown, Massachusetts, traced the factors that made this "a day of trouble, of reviling and blasphemy" back to France. "In conformity to a deep-laid plan," the French, "in cherishing party spirit, in vilifying the men we have, by our free suffrages, elected to administer our Constitution... have thus endeavored to destroy the confidence of the people in the constituted authorities, and divide them from the government."<sup>1</sup>

But worse than the political influences, are the effects of this "plan" upon American religious life. To it, "we may trace that torrent of irreligion, and abuse of everything good and praiseworthy, which, at the present time, threatens to overwhelm the world."<sup>2</sup> "The existence of a God is boldly denied. Atheism and materialism are systematically professed. Reason and Nature are deified and adored. The Christian religion, and its divine and blessed Author, are not only disbelieved, rejected and contemned, but even abhorred, and efforts made to efface their very name from the earth."<sup>3</sup>

Timothy Dwight, who succeeded Ezra Stiles as president of Yale in

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1. Jedidiah Morse. "A Sermon, delivered...May 9, 1798, being the day recommended by John Adams, President of the United States of America, for Solemn Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer." P. 13.

2. Ibid. P. 20.

3. Ibid. P. 18.

1795, was by virtue of his position and his ability, perhaps the leading voice raised against France. In 1788, he had published a vigorous attack on heterodoxy under the title of "The Triumph of Infidelity," which he had dedicated to Voltaire, teacher of the doctrine "that the chief end of man was, to slander his God, and abuse him forever." In it Ethan Allen is described as "the great Clodhopping oracle of man" who "bustled, bruised, and swore."

In 1798, Dwight's concern over infidelity brought forth two publications; one, "The Nature and Danger, of the Infidel Philosophy", was his baccalaureate address in 1797. The second, and the more important, was "The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis", a sermon preached on July 4th, 1798.

Dwight, like Morse, accepted John Robison's "Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe", and was convinced that there was a "plot" or a "plan" for "exterminating Christianity, Natural Religion, the belief of a God, of that immortality of the Soul, and of Moral obligation; for the rooting out of the world civil and domestic government, the right of property, marriage, natural affection, chastity, and decency; and in a word for destroying whatever is virtuous, refined or desirable, and introducing again universal savageness and brutism."<sup>1</sup>

In the societies of the Illuminati (a secret deistic and republican society started in Bavaria in 1776, aiming at emancipation from despotism and superstition, of which there were remotely similar counterparts in this country) "every novel, licentious, and alarming opinion was resolutely advanced. Minds, already tinged with philosophism, were here

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1. Dwight. The Nature, and Danger, of Infidel Philosophy. P. 50.

speedily blackened with a deep and deadly die; and those, who came fresh and innocent to the scene of contamination, became early and irremediably corrupted", according to Dwight.<sup>1</sup> But, "Where religion prevails, Illuminatism cannot make disciples, a French directory cannot govern, a nation cannot be made slaves, nor villains, nor atheists, nor beasts. To destroy us, therefore, in this dreadful sense, our enemies must first destroy our Sabbath, and seduce us from the house of God."<sup>2</sup>

Dwight saw the influence of these destructive forces permeating every aspect of life by every available method. "No personal or national interest of man has been uninvaded; no impious statement or action, against God has been spared; no malignant hostility against piety, and moral obligation universally, have been, not merely trodden under foot; this might have resulted from vehemence and passion; but ridiculed, spurned and insulted, as the childish bugbears of driveling idiocy...Nor has any act, violence, or means, been unemployed to accomplish these evils."<sup>3</sup>

We cannot follow the opposition to France which developed in many of the New England churches, nor have we touched at all upon the more extreme, and hysterical expressions of it.<sup>4</sup> Suffice it to say that it was a wide-spread and very articulate opposition, the results of which were to throw all sorts of liberalism on the defensive, and to create a mind-set unfavorable to the more radical ideas. It undoubtedly checked the spread of points of view which could be easily traced to the extreme modes of thought in France. Yet liberalism, and some of the implications of the more extreme modes of thought continued to spread. One meets here an

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1. Dwight. The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis. P. 11.

2. Ibid. P. 18.

3. Ibid. P. 20.

4. cf. Beard. The Rise of American Civilization. P. 366.

almost perfect illustration of what W. A. Visser 'T Hooft points out: that while the more thorough-going religious radicalism of Europe was rebuffed at the front-doors of America, this religious radicalism took its revenge by "returning through a number of back-doors."<sup>1</sup>

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In the year of Ware's election to the Hollis Professorship at Harvard (1805) the "Panoplist", a magazine to actively defend the ancient faith, was founded by an Association of Friends to Evangelical Truth, largely through the influence of Jedidiah Morse. This aggressive, vigorous magazine was in a sense brought into being to counteract the "Monthly Anthology", which though not devoted exclusively or even primarily to the cause of theological liberalism, "was decidedly sympathetic" to the cast of doctrine of the Boston liberals who sponsored it. In the "Panoplist", Morse attacked incessantly the liberals, and urged them, if they disbelieved the Trinity, to come out and say so openly.

Indicative of the growing strife between the parties and of the final break which was to come between the Calvinists and the Unitarians, was a series of incidents. In 1805, the Rev. John Sherman of Mansfield, Connecticut, published "One God in One Person only, and Jesus Christ a Being distinct from God, dependent upon Him for his Existence and his various Powers." "This was the most anti-Trinitarian treatise that had yet originated in New England."<sup>2</sup> Sherman was in a region where his views found little support, and he was dismissed from his church by a council, though approved by a large proportion of his church.

In 1808, when John Codman was settled over the Second Church in

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1. W. A. Visser 'T Hooft. Background of the Social Gospel in America. P. 114.
  2. Walker. History of the Congregational Churches. P. 336.

Dorchester, he announced he would not exchange pulpits with men of liberal views. In 1813, however, a liberal minority withdrew from this church and organized a new one. In 1810, a group of conservatives withdrew from the church at New Bedford. In 1811, at Sandwich, the minister was dismissed for his Calvinism. In 1810, Noah Worcester published his "Bible News" in which he expressed the view that "the self-existent God is only one person. . ."; that "by the Holy Ghost is intended the fulness of God, or the efficient, productive emanations of the divine fulness".<sup>1</sup> For this book, Worcester was bitterly attacked by his fellow ministers, and forced to leave his pulpit in New Hampshire.

With such minor skirmishes the controversy continued until 1815, when something occurred which deserves to be considered the second main battle of the "war". In 1812, Thomas Belsham, an English Unitarian, had published a life of Theophilus Lindsey which contained a chapter on the progress of Unitarianism in New England. Belsham quoted letters from James Freeman of King's Chapel, Boston, and others, which indicated that most of the Boston clergy were Unitarian. Jedidiah Morse discovered this book in 1815, and promptly reprinted the entire chapter under the title of "American Unitarianism." It created a tremendous sensation.<sup>2</sup> In five months five editions were exhausted and the air rang with charges and counter-charges. The "Panoplist" charged that the liberals were secretly scheming to undermine the orthodox faith, and "were hypocrites for concealing their true beliefs; and that the orthodox ought therefore at once to separate from those who, since they denied the deity of Christ, could not be considered Christians at all."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Quoted in Foster. A History of New England Theology. P. 280.

2. cf. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 411. Also Foster. A History of New England Theology. P. 281.

3. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 411.

The name "Unitarian" stuck to the liberals though it was not strictly accurate. The New England liberals were for the most part Arians. The letters from this country to England reporting that most of the Boston clergy were "Unitarian" meant chiefly that they disbelieved the doctrine of the Trinity, though they were not Unitarian in the sense of the Unitarianism of the English group - Priestly, Belsham, Lindsey. The New England liberals were outraged at Morse's double charges of a plot to destroy orthodoxy, and of Unitarianism. They refused the challenge to "separate". William Ellery Channing, in an open letter, made it clear that he regarded a call to separate as a great wrong to Christianity; as unfair to the liberals who were not "Unitarians" but "liberal Christians", "rational Christians", "catholic Christians", who simply held more liberal views of the scripture teaching than did others.<sup>1</sup>

The controversy continued. On the orthodox side, Dr. Samuel Worcester of Salem - whose two brothers had suffered for their Arianism - and who had been dismissed from his church in Fitchburg for his Calvinism in 1802, was one of the outstanding spokesmen. He urged a separation: the differences between the orthodox and the liberals could not be bridged, he asserted. The strict Calvinists attempted to get the Massachusetts churches to form "consociations", with power to depose heretical ministers, as Sherman at Mansfield (1805) and Abiel Abbot at Coventry (1810) had been deposed in Connecticut. This move failed due to the resistance of the liberals and the less strict or more tolerant Calvinists who feared the plan as dangerous to freedom.

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1. Open Letter to the Rev. Samuel C. Thatcher of the New South Church, quoted by William Henry Channing. The Life of William Ellery Channing. P. 194 ff.



Up to this time the liberals had been concerned to deny the charges of Unitarianism and of plotting to overthrow orthodoxy on one hand, and on the other to assert the necessity and desirability of avoiding a break. Their efforts had therefore been appeasive as well as defensive. But the attacks of the orthodox grew more, rather than less, bitter, and at last a young man, William Ellery Channing, in his famous Baltimore sermon (1819) at the ordination of Jared Sparks, met the attack as the title of the sermon "Unitarian Christianity" suggests, with a forthright and vigorous statement of the liberal position. This sermon marks the assumption by Channing of the leadership of the Unitarian movement, and to him we now turn.

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William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) was reared in a typical New England - Puritan - Calvinist home, though he moved out of that atmosphere when he went to Harvard College in 1794. Something of the state of affairs at Harvard during the period of Channing's residence may be gathered from the letters of Judge Story, a class-mate of Channing. Story wrote: "College was never in a worse state than when I entered it. Society was passing through a most critical stage. The French Revolution had diseased the imagination and unsettled the understanding of men everywhere. The old foundations of social order, loyalty, tradition, habit, reverence for antiquity, were everywhere shaken, if not subverted. The tone of the books and conversations was presumptuous and daring. The tendency of all classes was to skepticism."<sup>1</sup> Judge White, another class-mate of Channing, wrote: "Watson's Apology for the Bible, in answer to Paine's 'Age of Reason', was published or furnished for the students at College by the

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1. Memoirs of W. E. Channing. Vol. I, P. 60.

Corporation in 1796, and everyone was presented with a copy. So deeply and generally had the French mania seized upon the popular mind in this country, and so susceptible of its fiery influence were the ardent spirits of young men, all alive to freedom of thought, of action, and indulgence, that reason, arguments, and persuasion had a time no power against it."<sup>1</sup>

At Harvard Channing read Locke, Berkeley, Reid, Hume, Priestly and Price.<sup>2</sup> Channing's writings are veritably dotted with references to Newton, Locke and Milton. But aside from his long work on Milton,<sup>3</sup> his references to these men are of the nature of an appeal to their authority and fame as a support for his own point of view. Whenever his opponents suggested that there was a connection between heretical thought and immorality, Channing called forth these three men as examples of upright lives and liberal points of view. On one occasion he puts the authority of these men above the authority of the Church Fathers in regard to the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>4</sup>

But in college, according to his nephew, it was Hutcheson and Ferguson, who influenced him most. "It was while reading, one day, in the former, some of the various passages in which he asserts man's capacity for disinterested affection, and considers virtue as the sacrifice of private interests . . . that there suddenly burst upon his mind that view of the dignity of human nature which was ever after to 'uphold and cherish'

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1. Memoirs of W. E. Channing. Vol. 1, P. 62.

2. Ibid. Vol. 1, P. 63, 64.

3. See The Works of William E. Channing, new and complete ed., rearranged.

4. Channing. "Milton". Complete Works. P. 513. "We can now bring forward the three greatest and noblest minds of modern times, and, we may add, of the Christian era, as witnesses to that great truth, of which, in a humbler and narrower sphere, we desire to be the defenders. Our Trinitarian adversaries are perpetually ringing in our ears the names of the Fathers and the Reformers. We take Milton, Locke, and Newton, and place them in the front, and want no others to oppose the whole array of great names on the other side."

him, and thenceforth to be 'the fountain light of all his day, the master light of all his seeing.'"<sup>1</sup>

Apparently this reading partook of the nature of a deep spiritual change, for he marked the day and the place where he had read Hutcheson and they constituted a sacred memory to which he often referred "with grateful awe."<sup>2</sup> "As Hutcheson was the medium of awakening within him the consciousness of an exhaustless tendency in the human soul to moral perfection, so Ferguson on Civil Society was the means of concentrating his energies upon the thought of social progress."<sup>3</sup>

Of his views when he began his ministry, he himself has given indication. "There was a time when I verged towards Calvinism, for ill health and depression gave me a dark view of things. But the doctrine of the Trinity held me back. When I was studying my profession, and religion was the subject of deepest personal concern with me, I followed Doddridge through his 'Rise and Progress' till he brought me to a prayer to Jesus Christ. There I stopped, and wrote to a friend that my spiritual guide was gone where I could not follow him. I was never in any sense a Unitarian."<sup>4</sup> His first sermon (October 24, 1802) was on the text, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee", and it consisted of a description "of the large range of benevolent action open to every human being, however situated."<sup>5</sup>

Channing's sermon on "Unitarian Christianity", preached at the ordination of Jared Sparks in Baltimore, 1819, was, beyond any question,

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1. W. H. Channing. The Life of William Ellery Channing. P. 32.
  2. Ibid. P. 32.
  3. Ibid. P. 33.
  4. quoted in The Life of William Ellery Channing. P. 91.
  5. Ibid. P. 93.

the most important single thing he wrote or said. Wilbur has written: "probably no other sermon ever preached in America has had so many readers and so great an influence."<sup>1</sup> That may well be, but at any rate, in retrospect, it is clear that it meant that the break between the orthodox and the liberals - Calvinists and Unitarians - was now inevitable. The sermon was notable for its forthright and aggressive statement of the Unitarian position; and though it was a vigorous statement it nowhere descended to bitter or unfair partizanship. Despite the sharpness of the issues and the importance of the outcome, many of the other contributions to this controversy lacked directness and urgency. Not so "Unitarian Christianity". It was direct, pointed, and its lucidity makes it still a joy and delight to read.

"Unitarian Christianity" consists of two parts: (1) the principles to be followed in the interpretation of the Scriptures; and (2) the doctrines derived from this interpretation. The principles of interpretation which Channing set forth were those which biblical scholarship today utilizes: consideration of the context; identity of and purpose of the author; public to which it is addressed, etc. These principles doubtless were not new in that day, but they were sufficiently novel to the particular group to which Channing addressed himself that they created something of a sensation.

The basic principle introduced by Channing was the use of reason as applied to the study of the Bible. The depravity of reason was accepted by the Calvinists; Channing denied it and asserted that men are responsible for its correct use. "Our leading principle in interpreting Scripture is

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1. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 414.

this, that the Bible is a book written for men, in the language of men, and that its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books!" "We profess not to know a book which demands a more frequent exercise of reason than the Bible." "Without this principle of interpretation, we frankly acknowledge that we cannot defend the authority of the Scriptures."<sup>1</sup>

Under the second main head of the sermon, the first doctrine considered was the unity of God, "or that there is one God and one only." "We understand by it that there is one being, one mind, one person, one intelligent agent, and one only, to whom underived and infinite perfection and dominion belong."<sup>2</sup>

"We object," he continues, "to the doctrine of the Trinity, that, whilst acknowledging in words, it subverts in effect, the unity of God. According to this doctrine, there are three infinite, and equal beings, possessing supreme divinity, called Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Each of these persons, as described by the theologians, has his own particular consciousness, will, and perceptions. They love each other, converse with each other, and delight in each other's society. They perform different parts in man's redemption, each having his appropriate office, and neither doing the work of the other. The Son is mediator, and not the Father. The Father sends the Son and is not himself sent; nor is He conscious, like the son, of taking flesh. Here, then, we have three intelligent agents, possessed of different consciousnesses, different wills, and different perceptions, performing different acts, and sustaining different relations; and if these things do not imply and constitute three minds or beings, we

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1. "Unitarian Christianity" in Complete Works. P. 368, 369.  
2. Ibid. P. 371.

are utterly at a loss to know how three minds or beings are to be formed. It is difference of properties, and acts, and consciousness, which leads us to the belief of different intelligent beings, and if this mark fails us, our whole knowledge fails; we have no proof that all the agents and persons in the universe are not one and the same mind. When we attempt to conceive of three Gods, we can do nothing more than represent to ourselves three agents distinguished from each other by similar marks and peculiarities to those which separate the persons of the Trinity; and when common Christians hear these persons spoken of as conversing with each other, loving each other, and performing different acts, how can they help regarding them as different beings, different minds."<sup>1</sup>

To the argument of the irrationality of the doctrine of the Trinity, Channing adds the argument that it is unscriptural. He challenges his opponents to bring forth one passage from the New Testament which clearly teaches the doctrine of the Trinity. Channing further stresses the fact that the writings of the Apologists reveal no defense of this belief. Surely, he argues, the critics of Christianity, "who overlooked no objectionable part of the system", would have been quick to attack a "doctrine involving such apparent contradictions as the Trinity." That the critics of Christianity did not attack at this point, Channing takes as evidence that the doctrine was not a part of the Christian faith at that time.

One further objection to the Trinity is brought forth. "We regard it as unfavorable to devotion, by dividing and distracting the mind in its communion with God." "Now, the Trinity sets before us three distinct

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1. Channing. Complete Works. P. 371.

objects of supreme devotion; three infinite persons, having equal claims on our hearts, three divine agents, performing different offices, and to be acknowledged and worshipped in different relations."<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity hinders true devotion, not only by distracting the mind, but also by taking the supreme devotion which is due the Father alone and allotting it to two other lesser beings.

Leaving the concept of God, Channing states his belief in the unity of Jesus, or "that Jesus is one mind, one soul, one being, as truly as we are, and equally distinct from the one God."<sup>2</sup> His objection to the orthodox view of Jesus is expressed in the following way: "According to this doctrine Jesus Christ, instead of being one mind, one conscious, intelligent principle, whom we can understand, consists of two souls, two minds; the one divine, the other human; the one weak, the other almighty; the one ignorant, the other omniscient. Now we maintain that this is to make Christ two beings. To denominate him one person, one being, and yet to suppose him made up of two minds, infinitely different from each other, is to abuse and confound language, and to throw darkness over all our conceptions of intelligent natures. According to the common doctrine, each of these two minds in Christ has its own consciousness, its own will, its own perceptions. They have, in fact, no common properties. The divine mind feels none of the wants and sorrows of the human, and the human is infinitely removed from the perfection and happiness of the divine. Can you perceive of two beings in the universe more distinct? We have always thought that one person<sup>was</sup> constituted and distinguished by one consciousness. The doctrine that one and the same person should have two consciousnesses,

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1. Channing. Complete Works. P. 372.

2. Ibid. P. 373.

two wills, two souls, infinitely different from each other, this we think an enormous tax on human credulity."<sup>1</sup>

This doctrine Channing rejects not only on the basis of reason, but also in the interest of clarity and simplicity of thought. In addition, the teaching of the New Testament is against it. He denies that the idea of two natures is necessary to a harmonious interpretation of Scripture. "He is continually spoken of as the son of God, sent of God, receiving all his powers from God, working miracles because God was with him, judging justly because God was with him, having claims on our belief because he was anointed and sealed by God, and as able of himself to do nothing. The New Testament is filled with this language. Now we ask what impression this language was fitted and intended to make? Could anyone who heard it have imagined that Jesus was the very God to whom he was declared to be inferior; the very Being by whom he was sent, and from whom he professed to have received his message and power?"<sup>2</sup>

The relation of the idea of two natures to the atonement is considered next, and Channing denies "the infinity of the atonement" because by the admission of the orthodox, only the human nature suffered. "The whole humiliation is reduced to a fiction," according to Channing, because "the divine mind of Christ, . . . was infinitely happy at the very moment of the suffering of his humanity."<sup>3</sup>

He moves on to a consideration of "the moral perfection of God."  
"We believe that God is infinitely good, kind, benevolent, in the proper

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1. "Unitarian Christianity" in Complete Works. P. 373.

2. Ibid. P. 374.

3. Ibid. P. 375.



sense of these words, - good in disposition as well as in act; good not to a few, but to all; good to every individual, as well as to the general system."<sup>1</sup> He holds to God's justice, of course, but God's justice is consistent with and modified by His benevolence. Justice is "God's infinite regard to virtue or moral worth expressed in a moral government; that is in giving excellent and equitable laws and in conferring such rewards, and inflicting such punishments, as are best fitted to secure their observance."<sup>2</sup> The doctrines of total depravity and of election, are therefore inconsistent with the moral nature of God and must be ruled out. "Now according to the plainest principles of morality, we maintain that a natural constitution of the mind, unfailingly disposing it to evil, and to evil alone, would absolve it from guilt; that to give existence under this condition would argue unspeakable cruelty; and that to punish the sin of this unhappily constituted child with endless ruin would be a wrong unparalleled by the most merciless despotism."<sup>3</sup>

Channing's view of the character and nature of God can best be summed up in the phrase "parental character". "We ascribe to Him not only the name, but the dispositions and principles of a father. We believe He has a father's concern for his creatures, a father's desire for their improvement, a father's equity in proportioning his commands to their powers, a father's joy in their progress, a father's readiness to receive the penitent, and a father's justice for the incorrigible."<sup>4</sup>

In his discussion of the atonement, he asserts that Jesus was

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1. Channing. "Unitarian Christianity" in Complete Works. P. 376.
  2. Ibid. P. 376.
  3. Ibid. P. 377.
  4. Ibid. P. 377.

sent "by the Father to effect a moral or spiritual deliverance of mankind; that is, to rescue men from sin and its consequences, and to bring them to a state of everlasting purity and happiness."<sup>1</sup> And this Jesus accomplished in a variety of ways: "by instructions respecting God's unity, parental character, and moral government, by his promises of pardon to the penitent, . . . by the light which he has thrown on the path of duty; by his own spotless example."<sup>2</sup> Channing is forced to reject "the idea which is conveyed to common minds by the popular system that Christ's death has an influence in making God placable or merciful, in awakening his kindness toward men."<sup>3</sup> Jesus' death did not call forth the mercy of God; on the contrary, it exemplified it. Channing, therefore, dismisses "with strong disapprobation" the "notion that Christ's death changed the mind of God." The conception of Christ's death as influencing God is an impossible and obnoxious one because such a belief is unfavorable to growth of character, in that it "naturally leads men to think that Christ came to change God's mind rather than their own." No less repellent is the idea of vicarious atonement, both on the ground of reason and the moral nature of God. The mission of Christ "is the recovery of men to virtue, or holiness."<sup>4</sup>

This sermon ends with a section on virtue which makes clear Channing's complete rejection of irresistible grace. "We believe that all virtue has its foundations in the moral nature of man, that is, in conscience or his sense of duty, and in the power of forming his temper and life according to conscience. We believe that these moral faculties are the grounds of responsibility . . . we believe that no dispositions

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1. Channing. "Unitarian Christianity". P. 378.
  2. Ibid. P. 378.
  3. Ibid. P. 378.
  4. Ibid. P. 380.

infused into us without our own moral activity are of the nature of virtue, and therefore we reject the doctrine of irresistible divine influence on the human mind, moulding it into goodness as marble is hewn into a statue."<sup>1</sup> Such virtue would be comparable to the "instinctive affections of inferior animals", and could not rightly be called "true virtue."

In this long and complete discussion of "Unitarian Christianity", the most notable omission concerns the Holy Spirit. Channing, indeed, does mention the Spirit - in two sentences - but it is a vague, indefinite reference. And the reason is, of course, clear; when he rejected the Trinity, the person of the Spirit was gone, and "by his Spirit we mean a moral, illuminating, and persuasive influence, not physical, not compulsory, not involving a necessity of virtue."<sup>2</sup>

Only two other matters have to be considered to complete our survey of Channing's thought. In "Unitarian Christianity", he clearly surrendered the Calvinist anthropology. In his "Moral Argument Against Calvinism" he returns to this and discusses at length his objection to Calvinism. His objection centers in the doctrines of total depravity, man's inability, and the corruptness of his mind. Here again it is evident that the liberal theology departed from orthodoxy, from Calvinism, as much at the point of its conception of man as in its conceptions of God and Jesus. Of course, the ideas of God and ideas of man cannot be separated entirely; but in many ways liberalism changed first its thought of man and then went on to change its ideas of God.

The other aspect of Channing's thought to which reference must now be made, is his interest in social and political questions and reform.

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1. Channing. "Unitarian Christianity". P. 380.  
2. Ibid. P. 380.

His very first sermon, in which he pointed out the large range of benevolent action open to every human being, struck what was to be one of the dominant concerns of his mind and his ministry. Of the 1020 pages of "The Works of William Ellery Channing", practically half are sermons, lectures, and essays dealing with the questions of slavery and war. He wrote and spoke on all the moot public issues of the day. And here, as with his "Moral Argument Against Calvinism", his thought stems from his belief in the dignity and grandeur of human nature, the high moral worth and capacity of man, the sufficiency of human reason and the responsibility to use it.

Naturally, Channing's exposition of his Unitarian views did not go unanswered. Samuel Worcester replied in "A Letter to the Rev. William E. Channing";<sup>1</sup> Moses Stuart of Andover seminary wrote a whole book to defend the doctrine of the Trinity against Channing's attack, though he admitted that he did not know clearly what the doctrine meant;<sup>2</sup> and Leonard Wood of Andover went to the defense of the other Calvinist doctrines which Channing had attacked. This involved Wood in a controversy with Professor Ware of Harvard, who, of course, sided with Channing. This controversy, known as the "Wood 'n-Ware Controversy", ran to more than eight hundred pages of printed material and lasted three years. It was notable more for the fine spirit in which it was carried on than anything else.

We shall not try to cover the progress of the controversy between these men - who were by no means the only ones to write and speak about it - for it was an arid and unprofitable affair. The orthodox, with the exception

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1. There were three of them; prompted first by Channing's defense of the liberals in 1815, when Morse first republished the chapter, referring to Unitarianism in New England, from Belsham's life of Lindsey.

2. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 415.

of Leonard Wood, almost completely missed the point. They understood Channing's attack to be centered at the point of the doctrine of the Trinity. It was not, but even if it had been, the orthodox would have come off second best. In trying to answer Channing's charge of tritheism, Moses Stuart committed himself in one place, to the thing he was trying to avoid, and in another place left himself open to a charge from a Presbyterian source that he was tending toward Unitarianism.<sup>1</sup>

It was fatal to the orthodox cause that its spokesmen failed to grasp (Leonard Wood apart, possibly) the significance of the Unitarian revolt. They dealt with it as a movement in biblical interpretation or doctrinal criticism,<sup>2</sup> whereas Unitarianism represented a fundamental shift in the positions or assumptions from which religious and theological thought start. The most characteristic belief of the Unitarians was not the emphasis upon the unity of God as opposed to the idea of the Trinity - when Channing and his group at first repudiated the name Unitarian they did it because, first, they regarded it as unfair and inaccurate as a description, and second, because it did not express the distinctive thing about them - the most characteristic thing was the belief about man. It was from this different view of man that Channing's belief in social progress and reform came, and out of which his interest in morality and ethics sprang. A recent writer has expressed it in this way: "Liberalism in America was a humanitarian, and not a theological, movement. Boston was liberal before it became Unitarian, and its Unitarianism was primarily ethical and social."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 415.
  2. cf. Haroutunian. Piety Versus Moralism. P. 201.
  3. Haroutunian. Ibid. P. 180.

The concluding date of the period which this study covers is 1825. In that year the American Unitarian Association was formed, which marked the emergence, as a denomination, of a group of churches definitely committed to liberalism. Though the liberals did not want to separate from the orthodox churches, after Channing's Baltimore sermon on "Unitarian Christianity" a break was inevitable; a fact of which Channing may have been aware before and which may be signified in his use of the word "Unitarian" - a word to which he had previously objected.

While the issues which lead to the formation of the American Unitarian Association in 1825 were ecclesiastical and even legal, there was one interesting and ironical factor which goes back to an earlier theological and religious issue.

We have seen earlier in this chapter how the growing tension between the orthodox and the liberals caused the dismissal of several ministers. Before 1815, there were several cases in which congregations were divided and ministers dismissed. After 1815, however, divisions were more numerous. Frequently the question arose as to which group the church property belonged. That question arose in Dedham in 1818, following a split which occurred in connection with the selection of a new minister. In order to understand what occurred it is necessary to remember that in the Massachusetts towns for many years, there had been two religious or church organizations. The "parish" or "society" consisted of all male voters of the town organized to maintain religious worship, which they were bound by law to support. The "church" on the other hand consisted only of those persons within the parish (generally a small minority) who had made a public profession of their regeneration, and were admitted to the Lord's Supper. The origin of this distinction or division was, of course, the Half-Way Covenant.

It was accentuated and made definite in the creation of the "parish" or "society" by the provisions of the charter, which required financial support of the churches. The Separatist group at Plymouth originally maintained themselves by voluntary offerings, but later adopted the plan of the Puritan group at Salem, which had been provided in the charter given before they left England. The legal provisions changed from time to time, but as late as 1780, the Massachusetts Bill of Rights declared it the duty of the legislature to require the support of some Protestant group. The formation of the "society" or "parish" came, therefore, in response to the demand for a "voice" in the affairs of the church upon the part of those who were required to support the church financially, but were not members of the church.

By law, a minister must be elected by vote of the entire parish, although an earlier law had given only "members in full communion" the right to join in the election of a minister. The procedure was generally informal, with exceptions to the law being made frequently. In many cases the "parish" or "society" had been organized before the church was organized (that was true in the case of the church of which the writer is minister) and the "society", having taken the initiative in the beginning, continued to do so after the church was organized. Usually, there was no conflict of interest between the "society" and the "church", but provision was made, in the event of a disagreement, for a "mutual council" composed of the neighboring churches.

In Dedham, in 1818, the "society" voted to settle the Rev. Alvan Lamson as the minister. Lamson was Unitarian, as was a majority of the "society". The "church" - in this case as almost without exception, was numerically much smaller than the "society" - was evangelical and two thirds

of the members voted to reject Lamson. The "society" proceeded nevertheless, to call an ordaining council, composed entirely of Unitarians, among whom were Channing and President Kirkland of Harvard, and the council ordained Lamson as minister of the church. The two thirds of the "church" withdrew to organize a new church, and the question arose as to a division of the church property and endowment. It was carried to the supreme court of Massachusetts and in 1820, the court decided that a "church" exists only in connection with a "society", and in case of a division in the church only that faction which is recognized by the "society" has a right to the name and use of the property.

This legal decision aroused among the orthodox a storm of indignation so deep and bitter that it had hardly subsided after a hundred years.<sup>1</sup> This decision would of course apply either way, but since the Unitarians were in the ascendancy, especially in the "society" or "parish", the hardship fell almost entirely upon the orthodox. In eighty-one instances where the orthodox seceded, property and funds amounting to more than \$600,000 went to the Unitarians. This does not include the many cases in which, with no division, the "church" went Unitarian. Of the twenty-five original Massachusetts churches, twenty, including the most important ones, went over to liberalism. In only three of the larger towns of Eastern Massachusetts did the "parish" remain orthodox, and at Boston only the Old South.<sup>2</sup>

Churches kept on separating until 1840, though the larger number of divisions took place immediately following Channing's Baltimore sermon and the Dedham case decision. The growing consciousness of the Unitarians as a group resulted in the formation of several publications, among which

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1. Wilbur. Our Unitarian Heritage. P. 417.

2. Ibid. P. 418.



the most important were "The Christian Register", a weekly (1821), and the "Christian Examiner", a quarterly (1824). But the need for a more definite organization was felt. Spurred on by a group of a dozen young ministers, all recent graduates of the Harvard Divinity School, a group, laymen and clergy, finally effected on May 26, 1825, in Channing's vestry, the American Unitarian Association. The liberal theology, in the form of Unitarianism, was a full-grown movement.

### Conclusion

We have traced the religious development of the New England Colonies from the first settlements to the formation of the American Unitarian Association in 1825. We have seen that though the first settlers had a common Calvinist theology, there was a difference of crucial importance between the Pilgrim-Separatists at Plymouth, and the Puritans at Salem, with regard to ecclesiastical concepts. In the surrender by the Puritans at Salem of their idea of a national, state-church which included everyone, and their adoption of the Pilgrim idea of independent, separate local congregations made up of "believers only", a step of immense significance for the future was taken. The bringing together of these irreconcilable concepts led later to compromises such as the Half-Way Covenant, and the distinction within a particular ecclesiastical organization between the "Parish" or "Society" and the "Church". Moreover, the adoption of the Congregational or independent type of church government eliminated any general ecclesiastical control over the theological views of the ministry and laity, except through the medium of the local congregation.

We have seen the disintegration of the original Puritan outlook through changes in immigration; through the changes in the experience of the later generations of New Englanders whose lot was easier and whose convictions were less pointed than the first settlers; through the increase of wealth; through the inarticulated and often unconscious change in their outlook on life as their success in subduing a virgin continent gave them a brighter picture of man and his ability.

On the more definitely conscious and intellectual level of life,

we saw the solidarity of the original Puritan-Calvinist outlook begin to crack as books carrying more liberal ideas, and ideas that frequently opposed Calvinism, came to the Colonies. We have indicated briefly how the influence of European liberal movements touched the life of New England and raised doubts and questions. Arminianism and Arianism flowed from old to New England.

Not the least effective of the liberalizing tendencies was the communication and the contact of the colonists with French and English soldiers. Later as the revolutionary movement in New England gathered force and issued at last in the break with England, that revolutionary fervor had implications for the religious situation; resentment against one kind of authority easily leads to resentment against all authority. The desire for freedom easily becomes impatience with any restraint. Moreover, many of the ideas that surrounded the revolutionary cause - the concept of natural, inalienable rights, for instance - were ideas that sprang from a secular, humanistic, non-theological view of life, and that view influenced the religious thinking of the people.

Finally we saw the growing liberal movement find expression in Unitarianism and the formation of the American Unitarian Association, which was important chiefly as an indication that liberalism had reached that degree of strength and self-consciousness that a definite organization was needed.

In his book, The Background of the Social Gospel In America, W. A. Visser 'T Hooft attributes this change to the influence of the Age of the Enlightenment. He qualifies that point of view by admitting that the Enlightenment is too indefinite to be considered a movement; it is rather a general spirit. And he recognizes that in the extreme forms the

Enlightenment did not make much direct headway in America. We should say that it made less in the religious and theological thinking of New England than it did in the political thinking of men like Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and others outside of New England.

In so far as the Enlightenment spirit was antagonistic not only to Calvinism, but to religion and Christianity in general,<sup>1</sup> we believe that the Enlightenment spirit finds expression in Tom Paine and Ethan Allen rather than in Channing and the Unitarians. The chief influence of the movement represented by Paine and Allen was that it stirred up discontent with the existing theology and prepared the ground for the less extreme liberal view points. While it took deeper root outside of New England, its direct influence in New England was short-lived.

To the extent that Paine and Allen represent the true Enlightenment spirit, to that extent Channing and Unitarianism were separated from the Enlightenment by an important barrier. Channing and the Unitarians were uncalvinistic - their break with that movement was complete - but they were not irreligious or non-religious. There was a depth of religious feeling in them that is unmistakable.

There was, of course, a flowing of intellectual currents of thought back and forth between Europe and New England, but Unitarianism in New England was not a transplantation of Unitarianism and the Enlightenment from England and the continent; it was a thoroughly indigenous movement. Yet, if some of the fruits of the Enlightenment were, as A. C. McGiffert points out,<sup>2</sup> a belief in the goodness of human nature; a reliance

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1. A. C. McGiffert. The Rise of Modern Religious Ideas. cf. Chapter 2.

2. Ibid. Chapter 2.

upon reason instead of revelation - even a repudiation of revelation; a ~~home~~centric rather than a theocentric view of life; an emphasis upon morality, virtue, social reform and a deprecation of theology; then New England Unitarianism is to be regarded as in some sense, the New England counterpart of the Enlightenment spirit.

Unitarianism sprang from a changed view of man; his relationship to God; and the nature of the world. It emphasized the worth of man, his perfectibility; it was naturalistic rather than supernaturalistic; homecentric rather than theocentric; it relied upon reason rather than revelation. Its creed, in short, was that of one of its early leaders:

We believe in the fatherhood of God,  
And in the brotherhood of man.  
We believe in the leadership of  
Jesus, and salvation by character.  
We believe in the progress of man,  
Upward and onward forever.

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